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DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

Otázka identity v dílech Impresionista a Baumgartnerova Bombaj

The Question of Identity in *The Impressionist* and *Baumgartner's Bombay*

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this diploma thesis, titled "The Question of Identity in *The Impressionist* and *Baumgartner's Bombay*", is the result of my own work and that I used only the cited sources. I declare herewith that I have not used this diploma thesis to gain any other degree.

Prague, December 4th 2015

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ABSTRACT

This diploma thesis aims to depict the nature of identity formation in the main characters of two works of postcolonial literature, Hari Kunzru's *The Impressionist* and Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay.* The concept of identity is approached from two perspectives, the traditional and the postcolonial one. Apart from that, the reactions of the two characters to their identity crises are scrutinized. The goal of this thesis is to determine what consequences the extreme implementation of a fluid, therefore ideal postcolonial identity, and the fixed one, as its extreme opposite, might have upon human lives. Special attention is paid to the three terms crucial in the postcolonial theory, liminality, hybridity and mimicry and how they predetermine the characters of the two novels. The analysis shows that neither extreme approach proves to be viable or beneficial for the life of an individual.

KEY WORDS

identity, identity crisis, Erik Erikson's theory, postcolonial theory, liminality, hybridity, mimicry

ABSTRAKT

Tato diplomová práce si klade za cíl zachytit podstatu utváření identity hlavních hrdinů dvou děl postkoloniální literatury, tj. Impresionista (Hari Kunzru) a Baumgartnerova Bombaj (Anita Desai). Pojem identita je zkoumán ze dvou různých perspektiv, tradiční a postkoloniální. Kromě toho tato práce analyzuje reakce obou postav na jejich krizi identity. Cílem této práce je určit, jaký vliv na lidský život mají dva extrémní typy identity, fluidní, proměnlivá identita, která je v rámci postkoloniální teorie považována za ideální a neměnná, stálá identita jako její protiklad. Zvláštní pozornost je také věnována třem klíčovým pojmům postkoloniální teorie, tj. liminalitě, hybriditě a mimikry, a tomu, jak se promítají do hlavních postav vybraných románů. Provedená analýza ukazuje, že ani jeden ze jmenovaných přístupů se neosvědčuje jako použitelný nebo prospěšný v životě jedince.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

identita, krize identity, Eriksonova teorie, postkoloniální teorie, liminalita, hybridita, mimikry

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1 Introduction

This thesis analyses identity, its construction, shaping, functioning and examines, most importantly, identity crisis through the prism of both its traditional and postcolonial conception, using the example of the main characters of two novels of postcolonial literature, namely, Hari Kunzru's *The Impressionist* (2002) and Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988). Both authors are of Indian origin, neither of them currently residing in India, their works nevertheless thematically intersect with topics typical for Indian literature written in English, such as the conflict between the individual and the society, depiction of often traumatic historical development and the failing grasp of British colonial rule.

The highly complex nature of identity, of who an individual is, how the self is shaped and what the major determinants are, has resulted in a number of theoretical approaches and varying conceptions. What has proved indeed arduous to strictly determine, is whether one's identity is stable and unchanging, following the traditional understanding of identity, or whether its formation is a never-ending process as it further adapts and transforms as a response to the environment, situation, under the given circumstances. The latter is the modern, postcolonial approach representing a major twist in viewing the concept of identity launched by the postcolonial discourse. Accordingly, postcolonial fiction typically reflects numerous reversals in the lives of people affected by the history of colonialism and the need to adapt themselves, their identity, to the new, changed and perpetually changing circumstances. In their very essence, the protagonists of the novels dealing with the colonial and postcolonial situation are almost always subjugated to diverse demands the mixed environment imposes upon them, their task being to put up with it and fight to find their accepted place in the society, to resolve their identity crisis resulting from the diverse demands of different cultures. There are many examples to be found within the realm of the postcolonial literature which document such confusion, identity crisis of the main characters, who are thus assigned an in-between, liminal role, exemplified in famous novels by postcolonial authors, such as David Malouf's 1993 novel *Remembering Babylon*, Jean Rhys's 1966 prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, or Michael Ondaatje's 1992 Booker Prize-winning *The English Patient*.

These works have inspired me to focus on identity, its nature, creation, transformation and also, most importantly, the reaction to the crisis in its development in the two novels mentioned earlier, *The Impressionist* and *Baumgartner's Bombay.* Their main characters, Pran Nath and Hugo Baumgartner respectively, represent two extreme responses to the demands of the fluid, changing identity. Both works are certainly largely influenced by the culture and postcolonial history of their authors who are, naturally, trying to come to terms not only with their past, and the hardships of the individuals affected by it, but also with the nature of the postcolonial discourse. The two books share a strong storyline of an individual whose identity starts evolving in the environment of their family, yet the development is interrupted when the characters reach the age of about fifteen. At that moment, they are forced to come to terms with a completely new situation and have to reinvent themselves, create a new, fitting identity within an alien, hostile environment. Feeling rejected, disdained by their respective societies, representing the historically, politically and socially disadvantaged part of the society, both of them go through an identity crisis. The fascinating aspect of the two books and their comparison are the distinct strategies the major characters employ to solve this identity crisis. Pran Nath, or the Impressionist, completely embraces the flexible, adaptable approach to identity where he tailors it to the needs of the environment, stripping himself of his former identity (identities) and replacing them with a new one whenever necessary, whereas Hugo Baumgartner proves to be wholly inflexible, unable to react to the situation and unable to establish a new, suitable, applicable identity, he clings to the scraps of his childhood self.

Both Pran Nath and Hugo Baumgartner are confused and liminal figures, being influenced and shaped by many contradictory factors, biological, as well as social or geographical. They belong to a long line of other postcolonial literary heroes whose characters echo the in-betweenness, or liminality of the geographical as well as the historical and socio-cultural situation. They both belong neither to the coloniser nor the colonised, such as Gemmy, a traumatised English boy brought up by native Australians, in *Remembering Babylon*: "It was a white man, though there was no way you could have known from his look. He had the mangy, half-starved look of a black" (Malouf 3). Similarly, Antoinette from *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as a white Creole heiress in Jamaica, dangerously transgresses the roles assigned to her by the doubly-oppressing colonial, patriarchal society. The English Patient, from the eponymous novel by Michael Ondaatje, also incarnates an individual who belongs nowhere, who floats both beyond and between

given categories: “Erase the family name! Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert. […] I wanted to erase my name and the place I had come from. By the time the war arrived, after ten years in the desert, it was easy for me to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation” (Ondaatje 148). However, from the long line of liminal characters of postcolonial fiction, I have decided to analyse precisely the characters from *The Impressionist* and *Baumgartner’s Bombay*, as they represent the extreme poles of dealing with their liminality, with Pran becoming the incarnation of fluidity, dissolving completely between the categories and cultures, the other, Hugo, stiff, clinging to the remnants of his childhood self.

To provide a theoretical framework for this thesis, the first, theoretical part depicts the geographical background and short biographies of the two authors, mentioning also some of their most prominent writings, but crucially, it deals with the whole concept of identity. Firstly, the identity and its creation will be approached from the traditional, psychological point of view, inspecting closely the theories by Erik Erikson and Cote and Levine. Secondly, the postcolonial theory of identity will be elucidated in reference to the most prominent postcolonial theorists, such as Homi Bhabha or Frantz Fanon. Lastly, the theoretical part is going to deal with three terms crucial for the postcolonial theory, i.e. liminality, hybridity and mimicry, whose connection to the theory of identity and its shaping is indisputable since they respond to the inevitable in-between position of an individual living in postcolonial reality. For this reason, they will be considered from the perspective of the main characters in the two chosen novels, *The Impressionist* and *Baumgartner’s Bombay*.

The analysis is provided within the practical part of the thesis, at first from the point of view of the traditional theory, holding the view that identity is stable and fixed, and later using the perspective of the postcolonial approach, advocating the fluidity and instability of identity. The term ‘identity crisis’ will be employed both purely terminologically, as well as in its wider meaning. The narrow understanding is typical for the traditional approach to identity, which stipulates the successful completion of the individual stages of development, with the resulting product being firm and unchangeable, identity crisis is, therefore, understood as a failure of the process. The latter, wider meaning is typically observed from the postcolonial perspective understanding the identity crisis as something natural, inevitable and necessary for the stimulation of further development of identity.

The question which this thesis strives to answer, is what the postcolonial identity actually is, whether there can be such a thing as fluid identity and what consequences it has on human life. It will be assessed whether the identity that is constantly transforming and adapting to the requirements of the environment has mainly a positive, enriching impact on one's life as it is claimed by the postcolonial theory.

2 Theoretical Part

2.1 Authors

2.1.1 **Hari Kunzru**

Hari Kunzru was born in 1969 in London to a mixed family, his father being of Kashmiri Pandit origin, his mother English. Being exposed very closely and naturally to two different cultures at such an early age, considerably influenced his personality and world view. His family moved to Essex, where he grew up. Kunzru studied English at Oxford, later receiving an MA degree in Philosophy and Literature from Warwick University. As Jacob Silverman claims in his article about Hari Kunzru, "[h]e began his career as a journalist for Wired UK and other magazines [...] and he has kept up a varied career of literary criticism, travel pieces, and essays on politics and technology" (Silverman).

His writing skills have been honoured several times, for example, through being named The Observer Young Travel Writer of the Year in 1999, or by being appointed a member of the Executive Council of English PEN in 2004. *The Impressionist*, i.e. the novel this thesis is going to analyse, was also Kunzru's first major novel which won him not only great acclaim, but also the 2002 Betty Trask Prize and the 2003 Somerset Maugham award, while also being shortlisted for several awards, including the 2002 Whitbread First Novel Award (Prono). As Hari Kunzru himself explained later, as a winning author, he chose rather to refuse the John Llewellyn Rhys prize, since he could not possibly reconcile himself with the thought of being awarded a prize sponsored by *The Mail on Sunday*. His following statement clearly proves his natural, self-evident tolerance towards other cultures and his incomprehension and condemnation of any xenophobic views, which is to be found in his works: "By accepting, I would have been giving legitimacy to a publication that has, over many years, shown itself to be extremely xenophobic - an absurdity for a novelist of mixed race who is supposedly being honoured for a book about the stupidity of racial classifications and the seedy underside of empire" (Kunzru 2003).

Hari Kunzru published three other novels, *Transmission* (2004), *My Revolutions* (2007), *Gods Without Men* (2011) and a short story collection *Noise* (2005). *Transmission* is a narrative of a frustrated Indian computer programmer who spreads a malign computer virus and unintentionally causes a worldwide chaos. The novel *Gods Without Men* incorporates some elements of magical realism and, within its fragmentary structure

juxtaposing many settings, both geographical and temporal, it tells the story of a family with an autistic child who mysteriously disappears and appears again.

2.1.2 **Anita Desai**

Anita Desai is an author who undoubtedly belongs to the most prominent representatives of the Indian literature in English. Anita Desai was born in 1937, with her mother of German origin and her father a Bengali businessman. She has claimed several times that, due to her mixed origin, she always felt partly as an outsider in India, which also gave her the opportunity to study the society from a somewhat detached point of view, being an outsider and an insider at the same time. This feeling of being an outsider was strengthened even further, thanks to her predetermined role of a woman within the Indian society.

Desai's German roots played an important role also within her work, for instance in her 1988 novel *Baumgartner's Bombay*, she reflects the anxiety her mother felt during the World War II for her original home country and family. The frequent intertextual use of German nursery rhymes in the text alludes to Anita's own childhood. However, Anita Desai herself had never visited Germany until she was adult. Even though she spoke German at home and her father's languages, Hindi and Bengali, outside, her first language of literacy has always been English, since she learned it at school and because "she grew up surrounded by Western literature and music" (Tandon 8). Her literary aspirations were soon self-evident, as she published some of her short stories in various magazines during her youth and studies at college. She graduated from the Delhi University. During her life she had lived in Calcutta, Chandigarh, Delhi and Pune which, as Tandon claims, are places where most of her novels are set since the familiarity with the environment she writes about is immensely important for Desai (Tandon 8).

Desai's first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* which was published in 1963 was soon followed by fourteen others, three of them - *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984), *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) – were shortlisted for the Booker Prize. The novel *Clear Light of Day* depicts the tensions in an Indian family, whose importance is one of the major themes together with the theme of the status of women in India. In *Fasting, Feasting,* the confrontation of different generations plays a crucial part, with the children trying, and failing to fulfil their parents' expectations. It also portrays a typical Indian family where the daughter is supposed to marry well and the son ought to be as educated as possible. *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *The Zigzag Way*

(2004) or *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988) may also be counted among her other well-known novels. Although the most prestigious literary prize for fiction in English, the Booker Prize, was won only by her daughter, Kiran Desai, for her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), Anita Desai's novels have won a great number of various literary prizes, including e.g. Sahitya Akademi Award, Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize or Neil Gunn Prize.

Her writing is appreciated for its vivid portrayal of the inner life of her characters and its insight into the human mind. Tandon also mentions Desai's concern "with people previously marginalised in Indian fiction, primarily women, children and the elderly" (Tandon 11) as crucial for her fiction. She often discusses the position of women in the Indian society, disharmony within a marriage, isolation and loneliness as it is the case in *Baumgartners's Bombay*.

Since 1987 Anita Desai has been living in the USA and currently is a Professor of Humanities, teaching creative writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

2.2 Identity

According to Seth Schwartz, the author of *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*, identity belongs to the most commonly studied concepts in all kinds of social sciences It is therefore of great importance in various disciplines including psychology, sociology or anthropology. It encapsulates the conception of one's self, how the person perceives and expresses him- or herself both as an individual as well as a member of a certain group.

Schwartz defines personal identity as being influenced by the commitments the person chooses for him- or herself and those which are ascribed by others and also significantly by the personal characteristics and beliefs about him- or herself. Among those belong the different roles and positions one takes in relation to other people, participation in various social groups or the idea of where one belongs geographically (Schwartz 4). Another definition by Seth Schwartz summarizes all different aspects of self-definition which are crucial for one's identity: "these may include goals, values, and beliefs, religious and spiritual beliefs, standards for behaviour and decision-making, self-esteem and self-evaluation, desired, feared and expected future selves, and one's overall 'life story'" (Schwartz 3). From the great number of theories concerning identity, two conceptions are chosen as they seem to be both representative and well-applicable for a practical analysis.

2.2.1 Traditional Approach

This thesis examines identity mainly from the point of view of two conceptions, traditional and postcolonial, both of them having been formulated historically, responding to the current state of the world. The traditional theory of identity, represented chiefly by Erik Erikson, responds to the conventional fairly stabilised organisation of the world with clearly given boundaries and firmly established categories. Therefore, once it is successfully formed, identity is expected to be stable, fixed and almost unchanging. Erik Erikson therefore concentrates on the process of forming identity within the development of an individual, more specifically during the period of adolescence. The theory by Cote and Levine, which follows, still falls under the category of traditionalist theories, yet it already anticipates the postcolonial theory admitting the possible unstable nature of identity.

Erik Erikson's contribution to the theory of identity

The theory of psychosocial development by Erik Erikson originated in the 1950s and it is closely related to psychoanalytic conception of psychology founded on the works of Sigmund Freud. This approach, according to Peter Weinreich and Wendy Saunderson, the authors of the publication *Analysing Identity: Cross-Cultural, Societal and Clinical Contexts*, advocates the opinion that identity is formed in relation to the development of a person and therefore has its base in childhood and subsequent experiences. The person's identity is influenced by identifications and transactions with people around, such as a parent, friend, admired or despised person (Weinreich, Saunderson 7). This approach represents the milestone in theoretical conception of identity since the following theories have always referred to, or delimited themselves from this one.

Erikson's theory delineates eight basic stages which each human being has to go through to reach adulthood. Each stage contains a challenge, which the person has to deal with successfully in order to pass to the following stage, inducing a tension between two conflicting forces. For example, the first stage is focused on the tension between *basic trust* and *basic mistrust* which should be resolved in the period of infancy. A successful solution of this crisis causes the subject to gain the virtue of *hope*, whereas a failure in this stage produces the feeling of fear, uncertainty and insecurity. All stages including the information concerning the developmental period in which they should be attained, their crises and basic virtues are described in the following table:

Stage	Psychosocial Crisis	Basic Virtue	Age
1	Trust vs. mistrust	Hope	Infancy (o to1 ½)
2	Autonomy vs. shame	Will	Early Childhood (1 ½ to3)
3	Initiative vs. guilt	Purpose	Play Age (3 to 5)
4	Industry vs. inferiority	Competency	School Age (5 to 12)
5	Ego identity vs. Role Confusion	Fidelity	Adolescence (12 to 18)
6	Intimacy vs. isolation	Love	Young Adult (18 to 40)
7	Generativity vs. stagnation	Care	Adult hood(40 to 65)
8	Ego integrity vs. despair	Wisdom	Maturity (65+)

http://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html

The stage which is crucial for the formation of identity is the fifth one, typical for the adolescent age group, where the main aim is to resolve the crisis between ego identity and role confusion. At the end of this stage, the human being should be able to answer the questions "Who am I?" and "Who can I be?", which would help him or her formulate his or her own identity and thus reach the so called 'identity achievement.' The person should be allowed enough space to be able to discover his- or herself, because in case the adolescents are pushed by their parents and do not have the chance to find their identity, a role confusion, or the so called 'identity crisis' is likely to arise.

Generally, as Weinreich explains, "Erikson's definition of identity spans one's past sense of self, what one is currently in the eyes of oneself and for others, and one's expectations for the future" (Weinreich, Saunderson 7). Erikson understands the problem of identity creation as a task which should be fulfilled during adolescence, where "the child has to resynthesise earlier identifications for contemporary requirements of being recognised as a worthy member of the community to which he or she belongs" (Weinreich, Saunderson 7). Erikson justifies the task being focused on people in adolescent age, by explaining that in this period of life the individual realises various changes in his or her body, masters new skills and generally becomes more independent of his or her parents, who gradually lose their influence on the individual's life.

Erikson's ideas about the adolescent formation of identity were further elaborated on by another developmental psychologist, James Marcia. He classified people searching for their identity into various "identity statuses". According to Erikson and Marcia, the ideal identity status is the so called "identity achievement", where the individual has discovered and determined his or her identity. Those people who do not question the identities determined by their parents are in the state of "foreclosed identity", without examining any other alternatives. Another possibility is the "negative identity", where, conversely, the individual accepts an identity directly opposing the prescribed one. It has been proved that it is preferred to adopt "a negative identity" rather than having no identity at all. The status of "identity diffusion" suggests that the affected individual is not able to recognise the need of an identity development, as it is the most immature status of all, which may later result in a social isolation. Finally, those people who are still actively searching for their identities are in the so called "moratorium" (Weinreich, Saunderson 8, 9). This application of Erikson's ideas has been very popular and is considered to be very useful in research. Another follower of Erik Erikson's teaching is R. D. Laing. His

definition of identity also emphasises past, current and future components of the experienced self and he focuses especially on family dynamics, predominantly in the dysfunctional families and other social interaction processes.

One of the key concepts of Erikson's theory is the term "identity crisis". Erikson defines it "as a period during which an individual's (childhood) identity is no longer experienced as suitable, but a new identity is not yet established" (Cote, Levine 95). Therefore, in case an individual is not able to establish his or her identity within the psychosocial stage which deals with the struggle between ego identity and role confusion, his or her development leads to the role confusion or "identity crisis". As a response to this failure, the individual is often prone to experiment with different lifestyles, with different identities that he or she creates, sometimes even experimenting with crime, drugs and the like, adopting the so called "negative identity". As a result, the identity of a person who has gone through an identity crisis might be very unstable and the feeling of frustration often leads to unhappiness or dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, an identity crisis of some form is perceived as a somewhat natural consequence of the transition between childhood and adulthood. Given that the individual manages to overcome this crisis successfully (usually with the help of parents or other adults favourably disposed to him or her), a new, fully-fledged and strengthened ego identity is created. However, without the guidance of the culture one is fairly likely to fail in accomplishing the challenge and, as a result, might remain in the state of identity crisis far into their adulthood.

James E. Cote's and Charles G. Levine's conception of identity formation

James E. Cote and Charles G. Levine, two experts on social psychology and professors from the University of Western Ontario, Canada, who extensively deal with identity formation, published their volume *Identity Formation, Agency and Culture* in 2002. There they introduce the idea of identity formation which, as they claim, was a relatively straightforward process for a long time. Historically speaking, the individual simply adopted the culturally prescribed role without much choice or thinking about it, so whole generations were significantly limited by the former restrictive social customs (Cote, Levine 1). However, in the modern age, the individuals have to face the challenge imposed on them, which consists in the choice they have in forming their identities, a task people still try to learn to deal with. Cote and Levine emphasise that these alternatives also bring an immense responsibility, which ultimately causes difficulties with identity formation: "being unsure about what the people believe in; uncommitted to any course of future

action; open to influence and manipulation; and unaware that they should pass a sense of meaning on to their children" (Cote, Levine 2).

In their book, Cote and Levine introduce five typical identity formation strategies which incarnate the contemporary ways of coping with this difficult task. The typology divides the society into five different groups: refusers, drifters, searchers, guardians and resolvers.

The **refusers** typically behave immaturely, they prove to be overly dependent on other people, they have problems finding a job and generally mastering any occupational skill. Refusers tend to stay with their parents until their 30s and often find a group of friends in which they may retain the adolescent status and avoid entering adult society. The risk of this group of people is that they may lapse into heavy alcohol or drug use and may never find a stable occupation. People opt for this approach presumably because they "were likely given little structure and encouragement as children regarding engagements with their social environments, and as adolescents they were likely given little guidance regarding ways in which they could develop themselves emotionally, intellectually or vocationally" (Cote, Levine 3). This type of identity formation has become increasingly frequent in the late modernity.

The **drifters** seem similar to refusers in that they do not belong to any generally-accepted adult community. However, they are usually endowed with higher levels of intelligence, come from richer families or have the required occupational skills. A drifter feels too good to fit into a group or to follow some prescribed rules of the community, therefore does not apply the resources he or she has got. The drifter is then characterised by a chronic 'pre-adult' behaviour pattern, poor impulse control and shallow interpersonal relationships. According to Marcia, both aforementioned groups would fall into the category of the 'identity diffusion' status.

The **searchers**, as the term suggests, are trapped in the process of finding a community which they would fit into but none of the communities they come across fulfils their expectations. That is why they are distinguished by constant dissatisfaction both with others and with themselves. Their quest for perfection is endless since they always find something imperfect in their role models which results in them feeling frustrated and discontented. The danger connected to this type of identity forming is that the searcher's

own imperfections can cause great despair, hopelessness and depression. In Marcia's division, this group would correspond to the identity status of 'moratorium.'

The **guardians** differ greatly from the groups that have been mentioned before. They formed their identity without any huge problems or effort because they had completely internalised the values of their parents or those of the community from their childhood by having received clear structure by their parents. However, the problem with this strategy is that the affected people are relatively inflexible and vulnerable to all sorts of changes. Cote and Levine determine three ways in which the individual might be vulnerable:

> (1) The person can neglect to undergo certain developmental experiences that help him to grow emotionally or intellectually, (2) the person can over-identify with the parent, making it difficult for him or her to individuate as an adult and (3) the person may be unduly rigid in terms of his own self-development and relations with others (Cote, Levine 4).

If the guardians should be compared to any of Marcia's identity statuses, it would correspond with 'foreclosed identity.'

The **resolvers** are actively forming their adult identities, trying to grow intellectually, emotionally and vocationally, whilst taking advantage of all the possibilities that modern society offers, however disorganised it is. This strategy involves learning about the world and searching for the community a person would ideally fit into, both incorporating the experiences from childhood and taking the current state and conditions into consideration. From the point of view of Marcia's theory, this strategy would be in accordance with the ideal status, i.e. 'identity achievement' (Cote, Levine 3 - 5).

As far as the probable prospects of the different strategies are concerned, it might be anticipated that guardians and resolvers will experience upward movement within the social scale, whereas refusers, drifters and searchers are likely to experience a downward movement.

It is necessary to mention that both discussed typologies consider factors such as race, social class or gender irrelevant to the determination of the identity formation strategy. It is also necessary to realise that in late modern societies, individuals will always struggle to form identity and face problems while maintaining the already established identity. Cote and Levine also emphasise that the "social identities are becoming increasingly transitory and unstable in late modern societies" (Cote, Levine 6). This

understanding approaches the postcolonial conception of identity which is the subject of the next chapter.

2.2.2 **Postcolonial Conception of Identity**

Within the postcolonial discourse, the traditional understanding of the concept of identity has been much criticised. In his article 'Deconstructing Identity in Postcolonial Fiction' Cherki Karkaba points to the fact that identity was typically considered to be something invariable, stable. Both aforementioned theories by Erikson and Cote & Levine suppose that identity is universally formed within the period of adolescence and do not concede that there would be some space for a change in the further development of the individual. They also disregard factors such as race, social class or gender. Karkaba uses a quotation by Stuart Hall, cultural theorist and sociologist, to support this notion:

> The logic of the discourse of identity assumes a stable subject, i.e., we've assumed that there is something which we can call our identity which, in a rapidly shifting world, has the great advantage of staying still. Identities are a kind of guarantee that the world isn't falling apart quite as rapidly as it sometimes seems to be. It's a kind of fixed point of thought and being, a ground of action, a still point in the turning world. That's the kind of ultimate guarantee that identity seems to provide us with. (Hall)

Therefore, it might be observed that the older theories do not recognise the fluidity, changeability and variability of identity, which is advocated and studied in the postmodern and postcolonial discourse. The traditional view of identity, as Karkaba points out, rejects the variability and understands it rather as a danger or potential threat. This approach can now be considered quite threatening, since it creates the ground for various extremist, radical and nationalistic attitudes in requiring the identities to be expectable, identical, rather than different, variable, "Other".

Stuart Hall protests against the conception of stable identity, in that he claims that identities are constructed only through their relations to the Other, to the difference, to what it lacks, which gives them the positive meaning, i.e. the identity. An even more concrete illustration of this idea is contained in the following quotation: "The English are racist not because they hate the Blacks but because they don't know who they are without the Blacks" (Hall). Taking this notion into consideration, we might conclude that the Other is crucial for forming an identity and that only the experience with the Other enables the origin of a full and developed self, as opposed to the earlier conceptions which consider identity to be something given, inherent.

The major difference between the traditional and postcolonial theories of identity consists in the fact that the traditional theory reacted on the state of the traditional world where the borders were fixed, where the clearly defined limits and categories were not transcended. However, after the postcolonial discourse had claimed its importance and relevance, it was clear that in such a chaotic world full of changes and the crumbling of nationalities and countries, one cannot expect the older theories to continue to function. Therefore, even the theory of identity had to be accommodated to the new circumstances and thus reworked significantly.

The postcolonial conception of identity accepts and embraces the idea that identity is fluid, unstable and constantly changing in the course of one's life. The opinion is held that in the changing, unstable and fragmentary world and society, it is impossible to retain the same identity for the entire life. The postmodern and postcolonial discourse understands identity rather as a process that develops due to new experiences, new situations and new conditions. In his masterpiece, *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha claims that "identity is never an a priori, nor a finished product" (Bhabha 73). As a result, within the process of evolution of an individual, the self adopts many new, different identities, shifting from one identity to another, with the identities adjusting to the current needs and situation.

In his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said asserts that "[n]o one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting-points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind" (Said 407). This statement illustrates the fact that identity cannot be regarded as fixed or finished but that it keeps changing which, in the current situation of constant migration, globalisation and multiculturalism, seems to be understandable and valid. This idea could be supported by Frantz Fanon: "In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself" (Fanon 179).

The postcolonial discourse perceives the Other as an essential formative factor in the development of one's identity by stating that "the existence of the Other gives the self meaning" (Karkaba), i.e. by understanding that identity is formed through the relationship of the self and the Other. The constant negotiation between the self and the Other entails the formation of the hybrid identity that resides in a liminal space, i.e. in a space which is somewhere in between, on the way from one state to another.

The shifting, changing identity may of course cause restlessness or uneasiness which in some cases results in violence or some other atypical behaviour or even mental disorders. Such effect is often represented in fiction (for example in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys) and is caused by the identity crisis in the individual where the different identities are fighting with each other without any definite result. However, the unstable quality of identity is very often caused by the fact that the characters are forced to assume some previously formulated and accepted stable identity, but they fail and eventually collapse under the social pressure.

Homi Bhabha uses a metaphor introduced by Renée Green, an African-American artist to illustrate the impossibility to settle an identity into primordial categories. Renée Green likens the museum building and its parts - attic, stairwell and boiler room - to certain binary divisions, such as higher and lower, heaven and hell. The stairwell is then described as the liminal space, as "the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha 5). The huge contribution of this metaphor consists in denying the Manichean[1] thoughts about the world, rejecting the idea of things being either superior or inferior, black or white, good or evil. If the metaphor by Green is applied to the discourse of identity, then the metaphorical stairwell represents the great and significant space for the diversity of identities that let themselves be influenced and changed by varied factors. Thus, this liminal space where the identities are unstable, changing and not always clearly defined, defies the sole existence of the stable black or white categories which reside in the proverbial attic and the boiler room.

2.3 Liminality

Liminality is one of the key terms of the postcolonial studies designating the space, both literal as well as metaphorical, which is "in-between". The term is derived from the word "limen", a threshold (Ashcroft 117), which refers to transitional space, somewhere between inside and outside, simply depicting the space between clear polarities. Its importance for the postcolonial theory resides precisely in the fact that it describes "an 'in-between' space in which cultural change may occur: the transcultural space in which

[1] Manicheism was originally a dualistic religious system which was based on the conflict between light and darkness, the term Manichean is therefore often used to depict the binary oppositions between black and white, good and evil, love and hate etc.

strategies for personal or communal self-hood may be elaborated, a region in which there is a continual process of movement and interchange between different states" (Ashcroft 117). In fact, the postcolonial discourse cannot liberate itself from its liminal nature since its essence will always reside in a struggle over influence, political and cultural dominance between the colonial power and the affected nation.

Originally, 'liminality' belonged to the realm of anthropology, eventually coined by Arnold van Gennep in relation to his study of rituals, characterising the rituals of liminal period as "rites de passage". These rituals are connected with the process of transition from one stage of human life to another accompanied by various initiations: typically birth, puberty, marriage and death. According to Gennep, the transition from one state to the other proceeds in three phases: "separation, margin (limen) and aggregation" (Turner 94). During the phase of separation, the individual is detached from the original fixed point in the social structure. The liminal period denotes a phase when the state of the individual is ambiguous, having only few or none of the qualities of the former or future state. In the last phase, the ritual subject enters the stable state and becomes a part of the clear structure again.

As Victor Turner, a cultural anthropologist and author of *The Forest of Symbols*, explains, the marginal period of liminality refers to an interstructural situation as opposed to the basic model of society typical for its clearly given structure (Turner 93). This interstructural position is then characterized by some typical features which affect the subject of the ritual in the liminal period. Even though these characteristics have been formulated for the anthropological use in the context of rituals, they are applicable also in the cultural and literary studies for the description of the individuals, situations, time, or even places, which are somehow in-between.

In the *Forest of Symbols*, Turner uses an idea of Dr. Mary Douglas, a British anthropologist, who explains, that the "initiands" who go through the liminal phase of their ritual are often viewed by the rest of the society as threatening, dangerous, and even polluting. She claims that "what is unclear and contradictory tends to be regarded as (ritually) unclean" (Turner 97). From this perspective, the liminal characters, who are neither in one state, nor in the other, resisting the clear structural positions, are particularly threatening, frightening for the rest of the culture. As a result, this attitude to the members of the society in the liminal stage significantly determines their position within the society as deteriorated and marginal.

According to Victor Turner, the individual finding his or her own identity in a liminal period is invisible, both from the point of view of the generally accepted social structure or even physically. The members of a culture are used to seeing only what they expect to see, what is defined by the society's rules, not something which is somewhere on the margin, between the defined states. Seen strictly from the perspective of the universally accepted social structure, the liminal person is dead, which means that he or she might be treated as a corpse - buried, stained black and the like. Furthermore, the affected individual loses his or her name and is rather called by a generic name. It is interesting that in many cultures this name is the same for any transitional being, no matter which states the individual is moving between, showing the significance of the transitional nature of the person for the rest of the culture.

As has been said before, the state of liminal characters is ambiguous. The affected members are often considered neither alive, nor dead or both alive and dead. This particular categorisation serves as an example of the aforementioned thought of Mary Douglas who claims that the in-between, liminal individuals are found scary and frightening by the rest of the society, which is why their status might be often considered even lifeless. Similarly, the sex distinctions are unclear, the liminal personae being considered neither male nor female or hermaphrodite, both. Being stripped of anything they used to own and know before, both physically and mentally, the individuals in the liminal period are in the state of the so called sacred poverty - they have no property, no insignia, clothing, rank, status, and even no gender (Turner 95 - 98).

However, the liminal state also entails some rather positive aspects. It has been mentioned earlier that the state of liminality is considered "interstructural", meaning that the affected initiands find themselves outside of the standard socially accepted structure, suddenly failing to fit into any of the clearly stated categories and, therefore, they are found to be threatening, dangerous and polluting. Nevertheless, even in this state, there still exists a certain type of a highly specific, atypical structure between the ritual subjects and their instructors. The instructors are endowed with absolute authority which is never questioned since it is natural, self-evident and traditionally embedded into the minds of all culture members without any rational justification. Thus, the liminal personae also enter into a sort of structure, into which they have the right to belong even though they are on the margins. Their structural position in relation to their instructors is clearly defined as

submissive, which means that the social system functions in its specific way even in this state which is, from the common point of view, understood to be interstructural.

Moreover, the complete authority of the instructors and the indisputable submission of the liminal personae produce a relationship of total equality among the people in the liminal state. "This comradeship transcends distinctions of rank, age, kinship position, and, in some kinds of cultic groups, even of sex. Much of the behaviour recorded by the ethnographers in seclusion situations falls under the principle 'Each for all, and all for each'" (Turner 100 - 101). These bonds, which originated during the ritual, often persist for the rest of their lives. The liminal period also gives the people involved time for reflection when the individual can contemplate the society, culture, the sense of life and the world in general. This meditation enriches the liminal person invaluably, contributing to a significant change of the inmost nature of the person, which could not be caused by any guided instruction.

2.4 Liminality in Literature

The concept of liminality was easily absorbed in the field of literary studies responding to, reflecting and exploiting the teaching of Homi Bhabha. Primarily, liminality has been associated with postcolonial literature where its employment is justified by the situation of the characters which are usually compelled to come to terms with their double consciousness (i.e. the tension between their original culture, customs, traditions or language and the dominant imposing colonial power). The affected characters find themselves on the metaphorical stairwell, in a liminal space, still retaining some of the attributes of their native culture and gaining certain attributes from the new culture. In this situation, they are often negatively perceived as the Other or hybrid (see the following subchapter) by the members of the superior culture which usually is or at least is persuaded about being structurally fixed and polarized.

Nevertheless, liminal situations, characters and environments are by no means employed only within the postcolonial literature, but appear in literature in general, enriching it with a different energy, potential, colour, paradoxes, ambiguities, surprises and unexpected experiences. For this reason, liminal features are to be found also on many layers of a great number of classical narratives. According to the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory*, any literary journey can be considered liminal, since the pilgrims travel from one concrete place to another, crossing borders, being on the margins,

avoiding the main population centres and generally being separated from the rest of the world (Makaryk 580). There are also certain types of characters appearing in literature who are liminal in their very essence. Among those, apart from the pilgrims, belong, for example, orphans, children, slaves, court jesters or adolescents. Liminality is also to be found in Shakespeare's comedies, since their structural organisation bear resemblance to the ritual stages observed by Van Gennep. The separation might be exemplified in the shipwrecks or banishment, whereas the margin, the liminal phase might appear in the dislocation and in the confusions of identities so typical for the Shakespeare's comedies. The last part, "aggregation" is illustrated perfectly by the Elizabethan weddings which very often conclude the comedy (Makaryk 579). Liminal characters are further to be found in Victorian fiction, e.g. in Dickens' novels such as *Oliver Twist*.

According to Makaryk, one might even say that literary language itself is liminal, detaching the actual desired meaning from the words which are used, for example, when the author uses various metaphors, riddles, irony or puns (Makaryk 579). These devices obviously exert greater demands on the reader whose task it is to identify, or even decipher, the intended meaning of the author. The words, in this sense, do not symbolise clarity or aid in understanding the message, as their original purpose for simplifying communication would imply. However, they serve to conceal the real meaning and thus defy their original function. Another frequent feature representing the liminal status of the literary language can be found in words of foreign language which are deliberately left untranslated in order to create an effect on the reader. It becomes difficult to determine unambiguously which language the text is written in, since it includes elements of two or more existing languages; sometimes hindering the complete understanding of the message and creating the feeling of in-betweenness, of inability to categorise the text definitely within the scope of a language.

2.5 Hybridity

A term closely connected with the concept of liminality is hybridity. Whereas liminality signifies an in-between space, hybridity is brought further, in that it describes a mixture or amalgamation of the two influences. It refers "to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (Ashcroft 108). Hybridity can take on many forms – it may be linguistic (in the case of pidgin and creole languages or in texts which include elements of more languages, for instance), cultural, political and racial. Especially the racial discourse is often the environment where the term

hybridity has been used very often since the beginning of the 19th century. By then, according to the pseudo-scientific findings (based for example on craniometry), some races were described to be superior to others and thus the possible mixing of the supposedly superior races with the inferior ones was feared and condemned.

Within the colonial discourse, the term hybridity used to evoke and, partly, still evokes highly negative connotations. These connotations were largely racist because of their use in the imperial discourse, in which it was claimed that the hybrids, the polluting aspect threatening the otherwise clear and superior race of the colonisers, have to be actively and incessantly cultivated, because otherwise they would quickly return to their 'primitive stock' (Ashcroft 110). The term hybridity served simply as an insult to those who were products of miscegenation, of mixed-raced relationships. For some time, the term hybridity was employed as almost exclusively racist which is why the current use of the term is sometimes criticised.

In the light of postcolonial discourse, hybridity finally gained a positive connotation. Homi Bhabha sees hybridity as something highly beneficial, enriching the usual categories, cultures with new elements and thus creating greater diversity, breaking the monotonous status quo of the otherwise generally accepted categories. In *The Location of Culture,* Bhabha emphasises the importance of the mutual dependence of the coloniser and the colonised within the construction of a shared, mixed identity. Thanks to hybridity, the cultural landscape consists of an endless number of combinations, mixtures of various cultures, offering infinite horizons to the multicultural society. Therefore, despite the deeply rooted negative connotations of the term, hybridity should be understood as energising, refreshing and enriching within the modern discourse.

2.5.1 **Mimicry**

It needs to be stressed that the colonial dominance and education imposed on colonial subject may result in a specific form of hybrid identity, a concept of 'mimic men' as Homi Bhabha called them. He illustrates the existence of such people with a statement by T. B. Macaulay from 1835: "a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern - a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinions, in morals and in intellect" (Bhabha 124, 125).

The mimicry is understood as an ironic compromise, fulfilling "the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, **but not**

quite" (Bhabha 122). This means that the ambiguous, unclear, blurred identity is often a consequence of the colonial endeavour to change human beings so that their aspiration is to become identical to the members of the dominant group, to gain the identity "as we know it" (Bhabha 124). Nevertheless, these attempts inevitably result in the mimic Other identity of the affected people which is then, almost paradoxically, found comic or even threatening.

Generally, mimicry concerns the ambiguous relationship between colonizer and colonized. The colonized are often encouraged to adopt the culture, customs, traditions and education of the colonizing country, to embrace their identity and cease to favour the original identity. However, as Bhabha uses Lacan's quotation, "the effect of mimicry is camouflage ... It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled" (Bhabha 121). This statement clarifies that the individual does not change him or herself to be identical with the background, he or she can only pretend to be identical, adopt the same external features.

Such difference may be illustrated by the contrast between "being English and being Anglicized" (Bhabha 128). The result of mimicry is then only a blurred copy of the colonizer. Ashcroft explains that this copy can be quite threatening, because the borderline between mimicry and mockery is often very unclear and it is difficult to distinguish whether it had not crossed the line to become a parody instead. As a result, mimicry might produce uncertainty about the otherwise unquestioned dominance in the colonial subjects and thus challenge, cast doubt upon the degree of control over the colonized.

3 Practical Part

3.1 *The Impressionist*

"In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself" (Fanon 179).

The story of the Impressionist depicts the literal and metaphorical journey of a young Indian boy, Pran Nath, who, due to various unforeseen incidents, twists and reversals of fortune, is forced to transform his identity to be able to fit into the new circumstances and environments. It appears often with the subtitle "a picaresque novel" pointing to its very nature. Picaresque novel is a genre which originated in 16th century and which depicts the adventures of a roguish hero, usually low-class, who is able to make use of the corruptness of the society in which he finds himself and thus gets by, usually without having to work and always on the border of law and crime. Such adventures are also experienced by Pran who balances like a tightrope walker in order to slip into those categories, which would guarantee a better life for him, but always under the threat of falling, of being revealed and irretrievably doomed.

Pran Nath is born into a Brahman Indian family and is spoilt by the affluence of his family, not even being exposed to the outer world, living exclusively in the environment of their mansion close to Taj Mahal. Therefore, as soon as it is revealed that Pran is not the son of his wealthy, Brahman father, but of a casteless Englishman, the clash with reality, after he is expelled from the house and family, is the more painful and difficult to come to terms with. His uncomplicated, prearranged childhood, where everything has been taken care of and where Pran has been spared any possible obstacles or inconvenience, suddenly proves to impede Pran's newly independent development as a homeless orphan, sentenced to live on the street.

Since this moment, Pran starts to accommodate his identity to the environment and transforms his identity according to the current needs with an easy conscience; only to survive and possibly make his life easier, more thriving. Having experienced numerous incarnations, misusing his ambiguous, hybrid appearance and the skill of mimicry, Pran even manages to relocate to England and start studying at Oxford, seemingly becoming a part of the English high society. However, his endless chain of transformations ends when, during an anthropological expedition to Africa, he is confronted with a primitive tribe where the acquired, European identity is found to be the polluting aspect of his soul and for that reason is ritually removed.

3.2 The Question of Identity in *The Impressionist* from the perspective of identity

Being a spoilt child in a wealthy Indian family, Pran Nath's future seems to be filled with optimistic prospects which suggest that he would lead a happy, predictable, prosperous life without any significant complications. However, the revelation of his true father, and the discovery of his mixed, hybrid origin turns his life upside down.

Pran Nath was begot by Amrita, an opium-addict, and Forrester, a man of English descent. The very act of his conception creates a very strong impression since it takes place under mysterious, strange and even sinister circumstances. The fates of a travelling forester and a spoilt, opium-addicted Amrita, who is on the way to get to know her arranged future husband, Pandit Razdan, accidentally meet during a flash flood. The mass of water brings Forrester into a cave, where he is saved by an enigmatic woman, "a mother goddess" in his eyes, in fact Amrita, stripped and smudged with dirt, soil. Not knowing anything about each other, driven by primal, animal instincts, they engage in passionate, even violent sexual act. After sobering up from the previously unknown experience, Forrester suddenly throws himself back into the flow of water and drowns shortly afterwards. This coincidental, brief encounter proves to be fateful not only for the two main participants but also for Pran who was conceived during this intercourse. Fifteen years later, the disclosure of Pran's real origin launches an immense number of changes in Pran's life and indicates that Pran will have to reinvent himself in order to survive.

The reversal of Pran's fate is already foreshadowed shortly after his birth, when the astrologist predicts his life in a chart which "was strange and frightening. The stars had contorted themselves, wrung themselves into a frightening shape. […] The boy's future was obscure." (Kunzru, 26). The chart reveals that his life would be full of suffering and loss, passion and changes.

This shows how much his half-Indian and half-English origin determined his future development of identity that has to accommodate itself according to the current views and requirements of the society in which Pran finds himself. However, were it not for the revelation of Pran's true origin, his future would have been unaffected since otherwise the mixed origin would not have been possible to be recognised. The pivotal aspect which influenced Pran's later life consists in the intolerance of both cultures, Indian as well as English, towards the mixture of races. As has been mentioned in the theoretical part, anything which is hybrid or liminal might be considered polluting, dirty and potentially

dangerous for the social structure which results in the hatred for any hybrid, mixed-origin individuals.

Miscegenation was considered highly undesirable and threatening in India at that time due to the gradual development of the relations between the English colonisers and Indian inhabitants. After the beginning of the British colonial invasion into India, a lot of Anglo-Indian intermarriages took place since the distance from Britain to India was unfeasible for the British women. As a result, the British colonisers searched for partnership among the Indian women of higher castes, begetting mixed-origin children within this miscegenation. However, the position of these children deteriorated in the course of time. "By the late 19th century, after the Suez Canal's construction had made the long journey [from Britain to India] shorter, British women were arriving in greater numbers, mixed marriages dwindled and their offspring came to be stigmatised by many Indians as 'Kutcha-Butcha' (half-baked bread)" (Griffiths). The children of biracial origin were thus often rejected by both societies, Indian and English for being neither one, nor the other, i.e. somewhere in between. This fact determined the whole future of Pran Nath in *The Impressionist* and motivated him to adapt and change, or even steal, the identity to fit the circumstances which at times resulted even in him making profit of his belonging to both cultures.

The importance of racial homogeneity and the superiority of their lineage within the Brahman caste seem to be crucial in the family where Pran was raised: "Blood is important. As Kashmiri Pandits, the Razdans belong to one of the highest and most exclusive castes in all Hindustan […] The Pandits are known for their intelligence and culture" (Kunzru 20). In contrast to the generally positive attitude towards the respected Indian citizens of fair skin (i.e. the descendants of the Aryan immigrants who arrived to India around 1500 BC and who were responsible for the origin of the caste system in India), the reader may trace the evidently negative attitude towards British colonizers of unknown origin and lower social status, as embedded in the eyes of Pandit Razdan (the supposed father of Pran). This aversion is detectable from his very first appearance in the book and the general remark about his relationship to the British officials: "Pandit Razdan avoids shaking hands with the English Circuit Judge [… which has] everything to do with his horror of touching a casteless beefeater with suspect personal habits" (Kunzru 33). This dissimilar treatment of Indians with lighter skin is clearly illustrated in Pran's story where he is, as a child, glorified for having skin of an angel (supposedly because of his noble,

Aryan origin) and later completely detested after the revelation that his light skin is a result of a disapproved connection between a woman of a high caste and a lowly, casteless Englishman.

Furthermore, after the revelation of Pran's true origin, the maid Anjali presents him as a "bastard child of a casteless, filth-eating, left-and-right-hand-confusing Englishman" (Kunzru 39) and considers him responsible for the curse that had been put on their household as well as the entire influenza epidemic which afflicted their city at that time. His mixed origin is repeatedly mocked even by homeless people that Pran comes into contact with, for instance, by being referred to as 'half-baked' (Kunzru 44), 'blackie-white' (Kunzru 46) or 'half-and-half (Kunzru 52).

As his origin is considered filthy, polluting and even threatening to the otherwise clear blood of the Razdans, Pran finds himself expelled from his house and banished by his family almost instantly. For the members of the highest caste in India, Pran's origin represents something in-between, something hybrid, viewed as unacceptable and ignominious, which is why they do not hesitate for a single moment and drive him out of their house. This severe treatment of an only child springs from the established, cruel and nonsensical division of the social classes which is able to swallow any emotional, family bonds. Nonetheless, the fear of crossing the defined categories does not only appear in India and its social system, but is an issue of all established and seemingly civilised cultures. Pran's expulsion from his formerly familiar environment does not give him any other choice than to search for a new identity with which he would be able to survive.

3.2.1 **Pran's identity according to the traditional view**

Erik Erikson, the author of the traditional identity theory, suggests that one's identity is formed during the period of adolescence, approximately between the ages of 12 and 18. By this time, the affected person should have "resynthesize[d] earlier identifications for contemporary requirements of being recognised as a worthy member of the community to which he or she belongs" (Weinreich, Saunderson 7). However, when the world of a child, with all its values, all the things the individual had taken for granted, changes completely at the age of fifteen, it is presumable that the natural development of identity is greatly affected. Needless to say, this happened to Pran, when he was forced from the outside to embrace an identity not only different from what he assumed himself to be, but also a stigmatised one, i.e. the identity of a half-caste. This imposed change of identity, of course, causes great identity confusion in the mind of a 15-year-old child.

> He does not feel like an Englishman. He is an Indian, a Kashmiri Pandit. He knows what he is. He feels it. You are what you feel. Or if not, you should feel like what you are. But if you are something you don't know yourself to be, what are the signs? What is the feeling of not being who you think you are? Logically he is half-and-half. A blackie-white. But he feels nothing in common with those people. He does not think of England as his home. Home is here, on the other side of the blue door (Kunzru 52).

As the reader can see, Pran is now also facing a complete failure in accomplishing one of the basic steps in forming one's identity, as mentioned in Schwartz's definition, i.e. the importance of geographical belonging. Pran is not able to determine where he belongs, in terms of nation, due to the fact that he had been rejected from all the social, racial and national groups he was integrated in. He is repudiated by his original Indian environment, he does not feel like an Englishman, does not know the language, or the utterly foreign culture, thus cannot identify with them. What is more, he is declined even by a group of mixed people in the Agra Post & Telegraph Club, who found him too white, too beautiful and too European in appearance, but too Indian in manners. Therefore, it is impossible for him to define his identity as a "worthy member of the community where he [would] belong" (Weinrich, Saunderson 7) simply because he does not belong to any community, he is moving in an empty, vacuum space between the clear categories.

Another sign of the coming identity crisis is obvious in the remark "'him,' in fact, is fast becoming an issue" (Kunzru 65) which appears shortly before his first transformation. Pran comes to realize that he does not know who he is any more or how to define his own self. As it was mentioned in the theoretical part, the identity crisis might result in experimenting with various identities, searching for the potential right one. However, in this case, Pran is not enabled to search for his new identity, yet a new one is imposed on him, after being forced to embrace the identity of a half-caste, he is compelled to become a hijra (see the next chapter), a tool rather than a human being, not being allowed to decide for himself.

According to Erikson's definition of identity, it should consist of the harmony among "one's past self, what one is currently in the eyes of oneself and for others and one's expectations for the future" (Weinrich, Saunderson 7). This requirement for the successful formation of one's identity could not have been fulfilled either in the case of Pran, since his past self was made almost irrelevant after his repudiation by the family and the loss of all values and fixed points in his life. All his expectations were destroyed and the probability of their coming true was invalidated. Moreover, Pran did not know how to

define his present self and likewise had no one close who would be able, and also willing, to even think about his identity and what his self is in his or her eyes: "He is alone, without context, without anyone who cares about him" (Kunzru 103).

From the viewpoint of Marcia's typology of identity statuses, Pran's identity status had been changed from the state of *foreclosed identity* to the state of *moratorium*. Originally, Pran was not likely to dispute the identity prescribed by his parents, as the given identity promised bright future full of luxury. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the family environment was by no means an ideal starting point for a child and it is to be blamed partly for Pran's later hardship, since he was anxiously kept from the outside influence, not knowing what the world outside the walls of their mansion looked like. For this reason, he later found it difficult to come to terms with his new situation of an orphan on the street, having to take care of himself. As a result, when the identity of a wealthy son had to be left behind, due to his newly discovered hybrid origin, he found himself in a desperate search for a new self, which he was forced to find for himself without any help from people who would love him, without any experience with the outside world and its possible requirements and dangers.

Correspondingly, viewing Pran's situation from the perspective of Cote and Levine's theory, his formation strategy could be determined as a transition from the position of a *guardian* to a *searcher*. As a *guardian*, Pran had internalised the values of his parents and was completely reconciled with assuming the role his father designed for him, i.e. a member of the Brahman caste. However, after the circumstances had changed, Pran was forced to abandon his prescribed identity and search for a new one (naturally, in the role of a *searcher*). Yet he was never completely successful in this task, not because he would consider the chosen communities imperfect for him but because he had never truly felt accepted by the society.

According to the traditional theories, Pran's development of identity had been cruelly interrupted before it was possible for him to reach a fully-fledged adult identity within the familiar environment. In addition, he had not been allowed to develop his identity in relation to the world outside, his life had been restricted to his home, family and servants only, not once being exposed to the real world which of course aggravated his later situation as well.

Furthermore, as it has been stated in the theoretical part, the traditional theory of identity responds to the traditional organisation of the world, whereas the postcolonial theory is adjusted to function in the postcolonial, disintegrated and chaotic world. Therefore, it is of great importance for the identity theory that, from the moment of Pran's expulsion, his identity had been changing constantly due to new environments, requirements and circumstances until the end of the story. As it is clear from the definition, this fact somewhat contradicts the view of the traditional theory which sees identity as something stable and fixed for the whole life of an individual. Even though the individual is expected to go through the given stages (which would hint at some kind of development), the most important decisions and the whole formulation of identity should be restricted to the age of adolescence, at the end of which the individual is supposed to have formulated his or her identity definitively. Therefore, we will now consider Pran's fluid and changing identity responding to the new environments and circumstances, which affect him heavily and we will examine how his identity transforms in response to the actual conditions.

3.2.2 **Fluid identity in *The Impressionist***

"One after the other, characters appear" (Kunzru 419).

The title of the novel itself, *The Impressionist*, hints at the transformative nature of the identity of the main character, Pran Nath. The novel, as well as Pran's life, consists of individual impressions, each of them created for the sake of the moment and of the environment Pran finds himself in. It is a transient transformation into a new character which, however, does not affect the character's soul. The transformations, as the title suggests, are created only to make an impression, a surface sense of someone becoming someone else, belonging somewhere.

As has been explained in the theoretical part of this thesis, the postcolonial understanding of identity differs significantly from the traditional view, especially in that it considers identity as something unstable, variable and changing throughout one's life. The seemingly stable identity, as perceived by the traditionalists, is taken merely as a starting point which develops during the course of life according to the current needs, situation or environment. The modern conception of identity considers it impossible to retain the same identity for the whole life and understands the transformation of an identity as necessary for a normal development of an individual.

The fluid and changeable nature of Pran's identity follows from the whole impression of the novel where Pran changes his identity in every chapter (*Pran Nath*, *Rukhsana, White Boy, Pretty Bobby, Jonathan Bridgeman,* and *The Impressionist*) due to the new circumstances. Each transformation that Pran is forced to go through is signified by a part of the text documenting the change. It has to be emphasised that all these changes are a result of the context, of the environment Pran finds himself in, since Pran is repeatedly compelled to assume a new identity, a new role, in order to survive.

Pran Nath (a Brahmani son) - Pran Nath (a homeless) transformation

The first transformation Pran is forced to go through is signified primarily with his incomprehension of the whole situation when, in the course of a few minutes, his status is changed from a rich son into a homeless person with no family, no friends, no social status and no possessions. He goes through a series of emotions ranging from shock to anger, threats, despair, resignation and apathy. The suddenly changed status might be reflected by the scene where the people, whom he usually mocked and tormented, start to throw dung and excrements on him, indicating his newly gained identity of a dirty member of a half-caste society, an outcast, a homeless person. In this situation, Pran has no other option than to become a part of the homeless society and accept advice of a fellow outcast in hope for a better future. However, his condition worsens even more as he is virtually imprisoned in a brothel, finding himself almost instantly drugged, dressed up in a silky costume and eventually unable to distinguish between the illusion and reality. All the time he spends in this residence, Pran is only half-conscious, locked up in a dark room with a single window and unsure about what is actually happening in his life.

Pran Nath – Rukhsana transformation

The reader comes across the second transformation of Pran's identity when he is taken away from the brothel. Deprived of any identity, freedom, will and being ill-treated, Pran is sure that any change to his current state must be a positive one, so, with the arrival of two ladies who take him away to the palace of Fatehpur, he believes that his life will only get better from that moment on. However, as soon as he finds out that he is going to become a hijra (i.e. an individual who is transsexual, a transvestite, an eunuch, who is impossible to be defined as belonging to any gender) named *Rukhsana,* being referred to as an individual of female gender, he begins to understand that future is probably going to bring yet more bad experiences. In the palace of Fatehpur, he is to become only a tool, an object rather than a human being.

His transformation strongly reminds us of the Indian philosophical and religious concept of reincarnation: "You could think of it in cyclical terms. The endlessly repeated day of Brahman – before any act of creation the old world must be destroyed. Pran is now in pieces. A pile of Pran-rubble, ready for the next chance event to put it back together in a new order" (Kunzru 65). Pran's current state, i.e. before his transformation to Rukhsana, metaphorically demonstrates the fluidity of identity as it is understood by the postcolonial theory: "The metronomic clatter of the pistons, the rush of displaced air; all of it hints at change, progress. Slowly something begins to congeal in the Pran-flux. Something new is happening" (Kunzru 71). However, it took a long time before Pran was ready to accept his new, lamentable identity. After he fully understood his situation of a lowly, meaningless individual forced to work hard for the first time ever in his life, he was able to reconcile himself with his new self and abandon his earlier identity: "With every swish of the broom, Pran Nath Razdan is falling away. In his place, silent and compliant, emerges Rukhsana" (Kunzru 101).

In the palace of Fatehpur, he is also made use of as a tool in the fight between the colony and the Empire, in that he is attempted to be employed as an instrument of professional destruction of Major Privett-Clampe, an influential colonial official. Major Privett-Clampe is supposed to be convicted of his immoral fondness for young boys on the basis of photographs taken during his sexual assault on Pran Nath. These attempts to disclose the depraved nature of Privett-Clampe fail eventually. In Major's eyes, Pran becomes *Clive* who is educated by Privett-Clampe and shaped into a model of a typical English schoolboy. Major Privett-Clampe has recognised the European element in his blood and aims to support and develop this element of Pran's self. However, the effect of this European instruction on Pran's later life is immense since Pran understands for the first time that his European looks could be used to make his life easier, because, as it has been mentioned, in the caste-system he is doomed as a half-caste child.

Pran's capacity to comply with the new requirements and situation every single time can be found quite exceptional. He proves to be immensely flexible in being able to accommodate to any environment in which he finds himself, no matter how painful, humiliating or demeaning it is (as in the case of Rukhsana). Yet his unyielding desire to follow the self-preservation instinct might be considered slightly dubious, since in all the cases he pursues only his own preservation, paying no attention to the effect his deeds may have on others. Therefore, the reader is fairly likely to pose a question whether Pran is not

a mere spineless, unscrupulous egoist deserving no compassion whatsoever. Nevertheless, his situation seems to be indeed pitiful and undeserved, so the expected effect it eventually has on the reader is probably one of understanding and sympathy.

Rukhsana – White Boy transformation

In Fatehpur, Pran still feels the ceaseless threat of death which would be an insignificant loss to any of the people around him. Therefore, he attempts to escape and, to his own surprise, he succeeds. After that, Pran finds himself in Amritsar where, thanks to his light skin and European looks inherited from his biological father, he is thought to be of English descent, receiving the identity of a *White Boy*. Owing to this, he manages to travel to Bombay with other English colonialists and thus escape from the riotous region from which the European colonisers are being evacuated promptly.

In Amritsar, he comes to truly realize for the first time that his mixed origin, which caused that his appearance is almost European, could be employed to his advantage to make his life easier within the complicated political situation in the then India. The first sign of him being regarded as someone else, someone of a higher status, appears at the beginning of the chapter where he is addressed by Indian farmers as "sahib" (Kunzru 179) and later when British soldiers take him for a child of some of their colleagues: "They think he is one of them. […] How can they be so blind? How can they not tell?" (Kunzru 185). Not until this time does Pran realize this fact and starts to truly appreciate the European component of his blood by suddenly feeling "the colour streaming off him like sweat" (Kunzru 186). At once he wishes to close his pores and become as impenetrable as white marble. A few moments later, when he was travelling with the other British colonisers to Bombay, he sets a goal which remains the same throughout the course of the novel – to become one of them. The strategy Pran chooses to accomplish his aim consists largely in becoming as invisible, as average as possible, which is a thing he understood quickly: "He is a trespasser, a black cuckoo in the nest. He tries to make himself as inconspicuous as possible" (Kunzru 188).

White Boy – Pretty Bobby transformation

The first stage of Pran's new life which could be considered closer to the European part of his origin is his stay in Bombay with the Presbytarian missionaries, the Macfarlanes with whom he resides as their foster child, a partial compensation for their two deceased sons. Here, he is found after he successfully flees from Amritsar with the other, "fellow"

Europeans. After the failures experienced with his previous Indian incarnations, Pran comprehends that he should finally take his fate into his own hands, make use of his European looks and remodel his identity into a European, British one. He is greatly supported in this effort by Revered Macfarlane who wishes to cultivate, cleanse his partly dirty origin (caused by the Indian element of his race). Therefore, during the few years which he spends with the missionaries, he works deliberately on creating an illusion of him being an English boy. He achieves this by accepting an English name 'Robert', by adapting his outward appearance to the European minority (which is done through buying European clothes and following the British fashion style) and also by working on his language skills where his extraordinary endowment to imitate other languages and accents is rewarded.

The first image the reader comes across, which illustrates the reincarnation of Pran, reflects his endeavour: "He lights a cigarette, holds it elegantly, instantly transformed from a servant to a cocktail-party guest. To complete the illusion he leans on the wall beside him, crossing one leg over the other. A fashion plate. A man of leisure" (Kunzru 191). He does not omit the smallest detail which would reveal his true half-Indian origin and thus pays great and concentrated attention especially to his public visage: "Furtively looking behind to check neither of the Macfarlanes has followed him out, he straps [a wristwatch] to his wrist, breathes on the dial and polishes it on his European-cut trousers. Now he is ready, his outdoor identity complete" (Kunzru 201).

His success in acquiring his mentor's Scottish accent would be easily acknowledged also by a non-aligned observer: "Though the two look nothing alike, the youth's accent is strikingly like the beard's, with all the prim inflections of an educated lowland Scott" (Kunzru 192). Pran's talent for imitation is complimented on, since he is also able to flawlessly mimic the voice, rhythm of speech, body language and also sense of humour of the person he is talking to. As a result, he is able to seem as invisible and inconspicuous that nobody would even think to suspect him of being a fraud. His skill in mimicry seems invaluable in his life.

Pran's success in forming a new identity is assessed also by Elspeth Macfarlane, Pran's foster mother: "The boy is such a chameleon. Everything he touches, he seems to absorb. When he arrived he was so gawky, so foreign. Now he has become part of the place" (Kunzru 205). However, in opposition to her husband, Elspeth does not find Pran's transformations as laudable as the Reverend does, since she would appreciate Pran to be as natural as possible, preserving his half-Indian origin and not getting rid of it so completely.

That is why Elspeth's commentary on Pran having his chameleon-like skills should not be understood as praising but rather as critical and worried about the integrity of his soul.

From these fragments one can conclude that within the stage of his identity development, i.e. as Bobby, Pran's concentrated, elaborate work on his appearance moved him significantly in his effort to approach a European, British identity. This transformation was by no means natural or unaffected, Pran simply needed to approximate the European standard as much as possible to ameliorate the position in his later incarnations. Therefore he worked hard, studied the British nature, customs, conventions and habits to exploit his talent to look and seem to be one of them.

Pretty Bobby – Jonathan Bridgeman transformation

"Something like this has happened before, but then it was sudden and unforeseen. Now he feels as if he is leaking, all the particulars that go to make up Pretty Bobby draining away to leave behind nothing but an empty vessel. A husk" (Kunzru 273).

Accommodating to the current situation of political unrest in Bombay, Pran (Bobby) is promptly offered a chance to steal the identity of an English orphan, Jonathan Bridgeman, whom he leaves at the mercy of an angry, drunken crowd of Indian rioters. In a fast sequence of events, Pran, now Jonathan Bridgeman, is suddenly to be found on a boat to England where he heads to be educated. Pran's further transformation is rather a result of the self-preservation instinct which led Pran to leave the young Jonathan Bridgeman behind: "Bridgeman, the actual, physical Bridgeman, is already fading. Someone known for a few hours only. Emptied and reinhabited. He grins. How easy it is to slough off one life and take up another! Easy when there is nothing to anchor you" (Kunzru 285).

As Jonathan Bridgeman, residing in London, it takes some time before Pran settles and feels comfortable, belonging to the society. After having scrutinized the life of an average British citizen, taking up a typical hobby, i.e. attending dancing lessons and after having acquired the acceptable taste in fashion and furnishings, he is finally satisfied with his newly gained Englishness: "Between the petting couples in the back row, he eats an ice and feels Englishness begin to stick to him, filming his skin like city grime. This is what he wanted. This is enough" (Kunzru 303). Similarly, as in the case of Pretty Bobby, in this new incarnation the reader might witness the full embracing of the new identity and the complete merging with the character of Jonathan: "It seems to him that Bridgeman and he

have always been the same person" (Kunzru 319). Pran manages to absorb the identity of Jonathan Bridgeman, begins to feel like him, convinced himself that he *is* (and has always been) Jonathan Bridgeman. However, in a corner of his mind he still feels the fear of someone revealing his true origin. That is why he decides to bring his English identity to perfection during his stay at Oxford in becoming even more average, acceptable and unobtrusive.

Jonathan, with his chameleon-like skills, manages to become almost invisible within the crowd of other English students and tries to be as inconspicuous, conventional and typically English as possible. He succeeds in that, he immerses in his studies at Oxford and student's life and establishes a relationship with an erratic, capricious Astarte Chapel. To confirm the status of their relationship and his newly acquired certainty on the field of intimate relationships, Jonathan agrees to join her father's expedition to study a lost tribe of Fotse in Africa.

Paradoxically, Pran's absolute, successful penetration into the English society thwarts his ultimate plan to start a serious relationship and enter marriage with Astarte. It is highly ironic that the reason for her rejection of Jonathan was namely him being too conventional, average and of too English nature. "I know you, Johnny. I feel I know all there is about you. You're very sweet, but you're exactly like everybody else. You are the most conventional person I know, Johnny. [...] You're the most English person I know" (Kunzru 415). With this painful confirmation of Pran's flawless Englishness and mediocrity, an important stage of Pran's life comes to its end.

Jonathan Bridgeman – The Impressionist transformation

> What is static is set in motion. What is solid melts, unfolding, birthing itself out of itself ... And what about Star? He has done everything right, fashioned himself so perfectly. He has made himself into an accurate facsimile of the right man for her. Is it too late to change? Maybe he should revert to an earlier incarnation. Or should he go on? (Kunzru 418).

Pran contemplates his past series of transformations and witnesses a performance in a Russian cabaret which reminds him strongly of his own life. He sees a small man on the stage who, changing various costumes with every turn away from the audience, also changes his identity as perceived by the spectators: "In between each impression, just at the moment when one person falls away and the next has yet to take possession, the impressionist is completely blank. There is nothing there at all" (Kunzru 419).

With this image, Pran's previous life is summarized by this few-minute-act which uncovers the true nature of his transformations and reveals a sinister, different perspective that Pran had never had the chance to see before. Each of the reincarnations overlaid and overshadowed his former identity, causing Pran's own soul, his true nature and identity to start fading away, to peter out under the influence of all the incarnations, leaving few traces of his true, original self. The question which logically arises is about who he actually is, what his true identity is. As in the case of the performer in the Russian cabaret, one cannot distinguish between the original identity of the impressionist and his incarnations facilitated by images, lies and costumes. It is possible that a person who has gone through so many changes is really only a blank canvas upon which newer identities, pictures and ideas are projected without any deeper essence, without any 'real, true identity' which would lie beneath. It seems that this is the first time Pran becomes truly aware of his identity crisis and starts to think about who he actually is. He understands that his original identity, created during his childhood, was completely abandoned, found incompatible with the new environment, new state of affairs. Since then, his further incarnations were always formed in order to survive, to fit the new milieu and Pran was not given much choice to think about them, nor to ponder over their suitability or rightness. He only adapted himself to the new situation.

The moral aspect of his transformations, an aspect which is never examined by Pran himself, shows his rather shallow, superficial character denounced by numerous literary critics. He has never contemplated the degree of responsibility over the deeds committed while employing the foreign, borrowed identity. As we have seen in the transformation from *Pretty Bobby* to *Jonathan Bridgeman*, Pran found it extremely easy to strip off one identity, when it is not needed anymore, and embrace another, more suitable, more comfortable and more promising one; even at the cost of human life. There is actually no definite reason why the individual would have to endure disagreeable or even dangerous situations when there is always the chance to abandon one self and adopt a new one. The price for this comfort, however, is fairly high. It inflicts loneliness on the person who is not firmly rooted in any society, having no one to turn to during hard times and not even being sure who the person is. Besides, the identity of the individual is always partly shaped according to the views of the dominant Other, the decisive factor being what the others would expect from the person, not what the person him- or herself would want or aim for.

From this point of view, one's identity is to a certain extent always determined and controlled by other people.

The final solution of his identity crisis and searching for his actual, true roots is facilitated by the stay with the primitive Fotse tribe, which was the object of exploration of the expedition in which Pran (Jonathan) took part. After all the other, European, members of the expedition have been killed, Pran is the only one to be spared and even offered help: "Gently, the old man [the spiritual leader] lets him know the worst: that he has been possessed by a European spirit. He can draw the spirit out" (Kunzru 475). Only the ritual chief of a primitive tribe was able to detect infallibly the symptoms of the colonial pressure, resulting in Pran's existential uncertainty and persisting identity crisis. Thus, Pran experiences the ritual cleansing of the artificially assumed European identity of all manners, customs and habits that he had been painfully absorbing. As a result, he is allowed to return to the state of a free individual whose life is not determined by other people's expectations, requirements and necessities. As a person free of any bonds with the civilized world, the Impressionist starts a journey through the desert, an isolated place where "the journey is everything. He has no thought of arriving anywhere. Tonight he will sleep under the enormous bowl of the sky. Tomorrow he will travel on" (Kunzru 481). The Impressionist does not need to accommodate to anybody else's view of the world anymore. He travels alone, relies only on himself and lives for his own sake. In other words, he adopts the nomadic way of life, as opposed to the settled one, usually embraced by the Western part of the world. In general, nomadic lifestyle is an example "of the most productive forms of cultural identity, emphasizing the creative performativity of identity, as opposed to an identity derived from the physical affiliations of family and place" (Young 53). In this way of life, Pran is no more a victim of borders, nationalities or clearly defined races, but is rather connected with the Earth, as a human being moving around the world without any rigid connections and bonds.

Throughout the story, Pran is able to adjust his identity perfectly to the current requirements of the situation he has found himself in. Therefore, he can appear both black and white, adopt new identities which would facilitate his survival and accommodate to any new situation the fate brings him. In this novel, Hari Kunzru tries to reveal the nature of being English, Indian and also anything in between. However, Kunzru does not only observe the employment and functioning of these two labels, he ridicules and criticises them very strongly. By showing how easy it is for Pran to float between nationalities and

seemingly belong to them, Hari Kunzru presents how superficial, shallow, easily manipulated and prone to corruption these categories are. He demonstrates that there is nothing like true Englishness or Indianness, that these social labels are only misleading concepts which seem to be grounded in the basic, deep-rooted qualities that only the original, 'true' members of the English or Indian society can possess.

Furthermore, the English class system and Indian caste system are brought together to demonstrate how similar they are in their rigidity and their nonsensicality. In the example of Pran, it manifests that the seemingly impenetrable, insuperable social classes are again based only on shallow principles, which can be outwitted by a changed appearance, appropriate clothing, expected accent, customary taste and a plausible personal history. The ironic journey of Pran reveals, in all its nakedness, the senseless nature of classifying people in some set, prescribed categories who are then forced to assume the role which is expected of them, only to fit in.

3.2.3 *The Impressionist* from the point of view of liminality

From the depiction of the transformations Pran goes through, one could deduce that the whole conception of identity is liminal in *The Impressionist*, considering that his identity keeps changing from one to another. No matter how deeply the identity is absorbed by Pran, the transformation is almost always artificial and aimed at the outer world, pretending that one is who he seems to be. Pran does not experience any complete elimination of the last identity as, at the moment when he adopts a new one, the previous identity is overlaid by the following one. This is shown clearly shortly after he is rejected by Astarte: "Is it too late to change? Maybe he should revert to an earlier incarnation" (Kunzru 418), confirming that it would be possible to revive the seemingly forgotten, renounced identities. So even though Pran feels at one point that he really *is* Jonathan Bridgeman, it is still only a disguise. Pran fears his possible disclosure and feels foreign in the environment he finds himself in. He never fully becomes the chosen character, he only dresses himself in the costume to suit the needs of his environment so that the others cannot tell a difference. Apart from these endless transformations, being originally of mixed origin, Pran has always been predestined to be liminal, to be somewhere in-between – not completely Indian and not completely English.

Nevertheless, there are more types of liminality, or in-betweenness, which can be found in *The Impressionist*. Arguably, the most liminal character of all identities Pran created is Rukhsana. During this transformation, Pran is considered to be something

between a living creature and a thing, a possession, which is apparent from designating the two women who take him to Fatehpur as his 'owners' (Kunzru 70). During his stay at the palace he is deprived of free will or anything which would signify his human origin. The utterance of Khwaja-sara, his instructor, documents well this fact: "Will? Will? Your will is of no consequence. You don't have the right to beg. You are nothing, do you understand me? Nothing!" (Kunzru 81). Similarly, as in the case of the individuals, who undergo the liminal stage of a ritual within the anthropological findings of Arnold van Gennep, Pran is invisible, essentially dead, deprived of will, freedom and property. Nevertheless, one should also consider that these traumatic experiences might be somewhat parallel to those traumas every human being has to go through during their development. Such experiences are connected with the standard rituals, such as birth, puberty and other transitional processes, which are inevitably accompanied by numerous negative, stressful, unforgettable experiences. It has to be noted that during his affluent childhood, Pran has likely never been exposed to a traumatising, uncomfortable experience and therefore it might be assumed that his suffering is simply an inevitable part of his development, a price he has to pay for his spoilt childhood.

Besides, another liminal feature of his Rukhsana-identity is the status of a hijra itself. Hijras were historically the followers of the hero Arjun who "was cursed to spend a year as a hermaphrodite conjurer" (Kunzru 72). Even though Pran's fear of becoming a eunuch does not come true and Pran is not physically deprived of his genitalia, Khwaja-sara threatens him with it: "All it takes is a cut, one simple cut. This blade is a key. It opens the door to an infinity of bodies, a wonderful infinity of sexes" (Kunzru 82). However, as Rukhsana, Pran is always referred to as a female: "What shall we call *her*?" (Kunzru 71) which substantially questions Pran's gender and moves him to the liminal border between the two sexes.

As *Pretty Bobby*, Pran accepts a European name, Robert, but is still called a traditional Indian name 'Chandra' by Mrs. Macfarlane who would rather promote his Indian roots. In the conversation with Pran, she claims: "I think you should be content to be an Indian, which is more or less what you are. It is a fine thing" (Kunzru 199). Even though Mrs. Macfarlane's intentions are well-meant in trying to emphasise his Indian origin, they cause Pran's confusion about the true nature of his identity since he is already in the process of transitioning into a British student. Nevertheless, this passage only

underlines the liminality of Pran's origin, emphasizing the two-component nature of his blood.

Pran finds it also troublesome to compare himself with other people since he feels he is exceptional, not being one of them: "But if men and women are made of dust, then he is not one of them. … He feels he has nothing of the earth in him at all. When he moves across it, his feet do not touch the surface. So he must have come from somewhere else, some other element" (Kunzru 285). He is simply not sure whether he is made of the same substance as other people, or rather, whether he is a ghost moving somewhere between the real and the surreal world. Within this contemplation, we may trace vestiges of his privileged childhood, in that he feels to be something superior, as opposed to the rest of the mass.

The liminal position of Pran is well-illustrated in the chapter of Jonathan Bridgeman, at a stage where he tries to come to terms with yet another part of British life which cannot be omitted by an average Englishman – playing cricket. His body betrays him for the first time, hinting at his different origin: "Hay fever is an entirely new experience. It comes as a shock, as if the English countryside is taking revenge, making some point about people who belong and people who may pretend, but whose bodies betray them" (Kunzru 334). This allergic reaction and the related incompetence to actively take part in the game provide Pran with a position of a scorer which suitably accompanies his overall attitude to the disguised life: "He feels as if he has found his place in the cricketing world. Neither inside nor outside, participant nor uninvolved spectator, he becomes a minor recording god, observing the actions of others with dispassionate concentration" (Kunzru 334).

From the arguments stated above one can conclude that the character of Pran is liminal not only because of his inborn mixed origin, but also thanks to his incessantly changing identity and acquisition of new selves in response to the changing environment which always exerts newer and stronger pressures and new requirements to be fulfilled. Moreover, the main character of *The Impressionist* also features other signs of a liminal stage as it was described by Victor Turner: at points, Pran appears nameless, having no property, deprived of his free will, almost invisible, meaningless to others and with blurred gender identity.

3.2.4 *The Impressionist* from the point of view of hybridity

The theme of hybridity reverberates intensely throughout the novel, naturally due to the negative attitude towards the mixed origin of an individual rooted not only in the Indian society, but also in the British culture as it was mentioned at the onset of the practical part. The already established class systems and societies are simply petrified by the idea that their originally 'clear' race would be 'polluted' by a different influence caused by mixing of races. This view is highly stereotypical and discriminatory, stigmatising all those coming from a mixture of races, including Pran. The only advantage Pran possesses, as opposed to other people, is his ambiguous appearance. He might be considered both English (thanks to his white skin) and Indian (where his whiteness would be explained by his alleged membership of the Aryan, 'noble' race) and therefore, being both at once, he might opt for one or the other whenever he wishes and thus respond to the requirements of the environment very swiftly.

The book also elaborates on hybridity in the parts dealing with anthropological research carried out by Revered Macfarlane in the chapter *Pretty Bobby*. Owing to his own 'tragedy' incarnated by his child of a mixed race coming from his earlier mission, he has a strongly negative and almost disgusted view on such children, labelling his daughter as a collapse, a blur. His scientific conclusion is formulated as follows: "Compared to the parent of the higher race, the children are a deteriorated product. The mixture, if general and continued through generations, will infallibly entail a lower grade of power in the descent" (Kunzru 230). Similarly, he likens the result of the crossing of different races to a "mass of mixed peoples, perfectly comparable with our street-dogs and roof cats" (Kunzru 231). Reverend Macfarlane is the personification of the 19th and early 20th century anthropology, which for the most part considered the Aryan race the superior one. In the contemporary theory, any mixing of races, interference of the 'lower', 'less civilised' races into the 'superior' ones were found dangerous, polluting and degrading which only further corroborates Pran's demeaning position within the society. Macfarlane examines the skulls of members of various ethnic groups, measuring the size, shape, facial angles and other data as criterions of determining the degree of civilisation throughout the world which proves how superficial and shallow the then judgments of other races were.

Another hint at hybridity and its undesirability is made by the director of the school in London where Pran, as Jonathan Bridgeman, starts his studies. He likens the schoolboys and their fixed, historical categories into which they belong, to his beloved flowers: "Each

boy has his essential nature. … Surely, as observers of creation, we must look upon these boundaries as a good thing? Were there none, the flowers would lose their identities in a hybrid swarm, and nature would be in a desperate mess" (Kunzru 310).

Overall, hybridity is condemned by the social environment depicted in the book, which is apparent from the way Pran is treated as a half-caste, his opportunities being greatly limited due to his true origin. Not until he finds himself with the primitive Fotse tribe, is he able to become truly reconciled with his mixed origin and not to fear reprobation from the rest of the society. The main character, who is of hybrid origin, might be considered a threatening hybrid by some of the characters, but not so by the author. Kunzru presents him with certain compassion, rather as a victim of circumstances than a repulsive half-caste.

The character of Pran has been criticised for being too shallow and flat, somehow escaping any possible critique, since it is almost impossible to define or characterise him. Owing to this inability to pin down Pran's character, the reader is not able to criticise his morality or decisions, Pran simply remains a mysterious character. Nonetheless, he may be understood as a metaphor of all colonial usurpation, a metaphorical incarnation of any colonial subject, who has no other way of surviving but the strategy of switching identities and accommodating to the circumstances one has to face, in order to be regarded as a fully-fledged member of the society. In short, after he is expelled from the family and experiences his first major identity crisis, he simply decides to solve the crisis in an extreme way. He abandons his roots completely and endlessly transforms his identity without any fixed point of reference, bringing the postcolonial theory of fluid identity to absurdity, in an almost perverted, degenerated manner and without any moral reproach.

On the other hand, in case the individual would not be willing to transform and change identities according to the environment within such a complicated situation, he or she would be confronted with the possibility of becoming an outsider, an outcast who does not belong and who is swiftly rejected by the society. An example of this strategy where the individual refuses to adopt an identity suitable for the situation is the main character of the novel which is going to be dealt with in the following chapters, i.e. *Baumgartner's Bombay*.

3.3 *Baumgartner's Bombay*

Baumgartner's Bombay depicts the story of Hugo Baumgartner, a German Jew residing in Bombay, India, leading his solitary life with the sole company of his clowder of cats. The novel features several plotlines within a framework of a single day. During this day, Baumgartner is given different impulses which make him think and recall his past life experiences. In this manner, the reader receives a fairly lucid account of Hugo's life with all its ups and downs.

Hugo was brought up in a family of a rather prosperous Jewish furniture merchant in Germany. His childhood seems to be blissful, full of love, but also fairly reclusive, since Hugo has spent the most of his childhood only in the company of his comparatively old parents without being exposed to the real life outside or to other people. With the radicalization of the anti-Semitic atmosphere at that time in Germany, the situation of the family worsens, the furniture business is in decline and the prospects of the family become gloomy and pessimistic. Not being able to withstand the pressure, Hugo's father commits suicide which brings Hugo and his mother into an unenviable situation, the only option for them being the emigration to India. Hugo's mother refuses, whereas Hugo decides to take the chance and leaves for India where he aims to settle down and start a business.

After his arrival to India, he starts quite a successful, thriving timber business, exchanges letters with his mother and leads a happy, yet almost completely solitary, isolated life. Nevertheless, his swift transformation from an unsafe, imperilled existence in Germany to a prosperous Indian immigrant suffers a major setback and that is the absence of his beloved mother and the dubious character of her letters which include less and less relevant information about her state or about the situation she lives in.

Despite the success in the business part of his life, Baumgartner ultimately fails to adapt to the Indian lifestyle. Being torn from his family, especially from his mother at such an early age, results in his, still underdeveloped, identity not evolving any further and he remains frozen in that state. Therefore, Hugo becomes a child in an adult's body unable to establish almost any relationship with other people, with the exception of a former German singer, Lotte. He, rather naively, substitutes his family with a clowder of cats that he cares for, appreciates a strictly given order, as well as not being forced to decide for himself (as in the detention camp where he ends up after the outbreak of the Second World War as a possible enemy, being of German origin) and he is also distinguished by a complete absence of any sexuality.

Losing his job when the business fails to prosper, his life becomes shabbier and even more isolated. Hugo takes care only of his cats, collecting the remains of food from the cafés and restaurants in the surrounding area. His solitary life is about to end when he agrees to take home a young compatriot, a drug-addict and delinquent named Kurt and decides to take care of him as well as he can. Regrettably, the youth takes his effort utterly for granted, only using his flat to have a rest and a new dose of drugs, wasting the food he has been offered, and ridiculing Baumgartner and his lifestyle. Crucially, he inspects the equipment of the flat only to find the silver trophies from the fruitful period of Hugo's life whose considerable value he estimates. Later on, he murders Baumgartner mercilessly, only to gain some money from his trophies. With the exception of Lotte, who is devastated upon hearing about his death, Hugo's life is forgotten, not being missed or mourned for by anyone.

3.4 The Question of Identity in *Baumgartner's Bombay*

"Accepting - but not accepted; that was the story of his life, the one thread that ran through it all. In Germany he had been dark - his darkness had marked him the Jew, der Jude. In India he was fair - and that marked him the *firanghi*. In both lands, the unacceptable" (Desai 20).

In the novel *Baumgartner's Bombay*, we are confronted with a story of an individual whose identity is threatened and condemned in all the societies in which he occurs. In Germany, as a Jew, Hugo represents the highly undesirable minority during the rise of the Nazi Germany. His family is at first indirectly, then openly victimised and persecuted, for example by ruining the business of Hugo's father or by the humiliating sign 'JUDE' with which their door is marked. Later, in India as an immigrant, even after fifty years, he is not able to integrate into the society; always rejected, considered not-belonging, different, foreign, on the account of the colour his skin and also for the hybrid language he uses which discloses his origin instantly. In short, all the environments he finds himself in clearly manifest his rejection, which at first causes his great confusion and the related identity crisis, later his withdrawal from the outside world and introversion as a reaction to the crisis. Subsequently, having retired into his shell he surrenders completely: "Now the habits of a hermit were growing upon him like some crustaceous effluent; it required an effort, an almost physical effort, to crack it, to break through the liquidity and flow and shift and kinesis of language" (Desai 11) and Hugo starts to lead a solitary life, independent of others who do not acknowledge him as a member of their society.

3.4.1 **Hugo Baumgartner's identity from the traditional perspective**

According to the traditional view, the most significant base for one's identity is childhood and adolescence, when the individual has the opportunity to develop and create his or her own identity by "resynthesizing" the memories, experiences and structures, i.e. various behavioural patterns, which he or she gathered during the earlier years. The traditional view stipulates the necessary completion of subsequent developmental stages as the condition of the identity's successful finalisation. It distinguishes several decisive factors, e.g. the acceptation within a smaller social group (family), as well as within larger social groups.

Hugo's childhood might be considered fairly happy and harmonious, his parents giving him the love a child needs, his mother caring attentively for him, his father representing a great role model for the young Hugo with his authority and scrupulousness. Yet the anxious protection of their only child does not have an exclusively positive impact on Hugo's development, since he lacks almost any experience with the world outside of his family. Nevertheless, just like other ordinary boys, Hugo loves his mother and admires his father, wishing to become like him one day, to adopt an identity similar to his father's:

> His father. When he walked, there was no obstacle, and no hesitation. He strode, he paraded - his head held high, [...] his walking-stick with the ivory knob tapped the Berlin streets with authority [...] Hugo tried to ally himself with that by touching the signet ring on his father's finger [...] he tried to match his steps to his father's. (Desai 23)

However, there was always a sensation that he felt when confronted with other children, or other people, which hinted at his difference as opposed to them, him being Jewish. This feeling of otherness and inability to fit in sufficiently became apparent whenever he was afraid of not following the same traditions as the other children, e.g. the lack of Christmas presents and traditions: "What was the shame? The sense that he did not belong to the picture-book world of the fir tree, the gifts and the celebration? But no one had said that. Was it just that he sensed he did not belong to the radiant, the triumphant of the world? A strange sensation, surely, for a child" (Desai 36). One can see that Hugo had always been marked by his Jewish origin, since he was perceived as a Jew by the other people, even though he did not feel like one himself. Nonetheless, such a sensation greatly facilitated the feelings of being different, 'the other', not-belonging, of being stigmatised.

Baumgartner's identity crisis was created within the crucial state of development, where the individual should accept and acknowledge his primary identity. However, Hugo

feels that he is being condemned and disrespected by society because of the religion of his family, which obviously perplexes him, as it would confuse any young individual, and prevents the anticipated development of the identity creation. Therefore, it may be claimed that Hugo's identity creation has successfully fulfilled the requirement for acceptation within a smaller social group (family), yet he has not been able to feel and become accepted within the larger social group (e.g. at school). As a result, also Baumgartner's later identity has always been returning to the successful stage of development, to his early childhood years, creating a rather childlike character of an adult individual.

Even though it would seem that Hugo's childhood was very calm and balanced, and that his identity, as a result of that, reached the status of 'identity achievement' (according to Marcia's classification), fairly early, there were several reversals that thwarted his identity's stable development. The worsening persecution of his family and his uncertainty among his peers is the first obstacle on his way to a self-assured identity. It might be anticipated that the uncertainty among other children may have been caused as Hugo was unable to separate himself from his parents, still being very dependent on them, especially on his mother. All the more so, Hugo's identity reaches the status of crisis because the persecution denounces the Jewish label he is stigmatised with without being able to adhere to it completely, since it is not something internalized, it is by no means a fixed, stable part of his identity. During his whole life, Hugo has always felt more German than a Jew, not able to rid himself of the German identity, even after fifty years spent in India, still remembering old German songs and rejoicing in speaking German with his only friend, Lotte. Furthermore, apart from the unfair discrimination from other German citizens regarding Hugo's Jewish origin, it is the loss of his father (who commits suicide rather than to live in the state that persecutes Jews) which also contributes to Baumgartner's feeling of insecurity concerning the identity role he was about to assume (i.e. of a dutiful son following in his father's footsteps, adhering to the family traditions). Ultimately, when he decides to leave Germany for good and head towards a completely different, foreign, exotic country with a different culture, he is suddenly forced to defend his German identity (because it is the only stable point in his life) in an unfamiliar environment where it is not accepted and found unsuitable, unfitting, and later, during the war, even illegal.

Therefore, on the way to India, Hugo is unwillingly compelled to start searching for a new role, a new identity he can adopt, which would be found socially acceptable. Compared to the extremely flexible Pran Nath, Hugo seems to be much clumsier, reluctant

and rigid in acquiring a new identity. In fact, he embraces the completely opposite, extreme solution of his identity crisis, since he resigns and suspends the development, letting his unfinished identity freeze. One of the major setbacks is that this time he has to rely on his own resources and create his identity without the background of his family and other social groups which are defining and crucial for identity formulation according to the traditional conception of Schwartz's described in the theoretical part. In fact, Seth Schwartz considers the importance of social relations, roles and the position within society as undeniable for a successful identity definition, as well as the goals, values, beliefs or standards for behaviour that the individual sets for him- or herself. The unfamiliarity and foreignness of the environment that Hugo finds himself in, represents yet another obstacle for him. On that account it has to be concluded that his creation of identity within the adolescent age was significantly delayed and hindered, in that he was forced to reformulate the already partly acquired sense of self according to the new and unknown environment where nothing is familiar, nobody is known or favourably disposed to him.

Questioning and challenging his old identity, Hugo sets out on the way to India and he spends a few days in Venice where he starts exploring his identity, trying to find a new, fitting one. During this search, he also tries to examine his roots that he had rid himself of and which aggravated his situation in Germany, i.e. his Jewish roots:

> Hugo walked along, thinking he might find the Jewish quarter she had spoken of; if he did not see her there, he might see other Jews. Strange, in Germany he had never wanted to search them out, had been aware of others thinking of him as a Jew but not done so himself. [...] Perhaps it was important to find their 'quarter'. Perhaps over here he would find for himself a new identity, one that suited him, one that he enjoyed. (Desai 62)

In Germany, Hugo never defined himself or his identity as a Jew. It was always the others who identified him as one and therefore denounced and rejected him, as well as his family. In the new environment, Baumgartner feels that he needs to scrutinize whether the Jewishness is really something which would specify and define his identity. The fact that he does not find the Jewish quarter and gives up trying, suggests that his Jewish origin is not something he would find crucial or determinative for his life and his identity. However, it is important that he wants to search for his roots and thus find something fixed and stable within his identity.

Hugo's search for a new identity in India cannot be described as successful since he has never been able to establish a sense of self in relation to others, for example, in not

being able to see himself as a member of some social group or assuming a role within it. This is definitely one of the pivotal aspects of creating an adult identity as it is clear from the definition of identity, which has been provided earlier in this thesis, stating that in order to create an identity, one should be able to define not only his or her own personal characteristics, but also his or her social role within various social groups, in relation to other people.

Therefore, it might be supposed that, after his arrival to India, Hugo incarnates the identity status of 'moratorium' (according to Marcia), or a 'searcher' (on the basis of Cote and Levine's theory), always seeking a suitable identity; a social role which would fit him, but never actually finding it. This failure becomes evident when Baumgartner prefers the company of street cats rather than that of human beings and replaces the common need of any human contact with his substitute cat-family. Hugo restores his former, rather reclusive way of life, applied also in Germany, not dependent on any other people, immediately after his arrival to India: "He was left to himself. On that first day as on every other day, left to himself" (Desai 83). The reality that Baumgartner has never really longed for any close friends is also obvious from his disposition of preferring to be in contact with such people who show no curiosity about his life, just like his "Indian friends – Indian acquaintances, he corrected himself, because – to be perfectly truthful – they stopped short of being 'friends'. To be candid, had he any at all?" (Desai 150). His reluctance to find some true friends culminates in the moment when Hugo decides to adopt his first street cat and when he realizes he does not need any human company to be happy: "He picked up the nearest cat. Holding its fur to his chest, he closed his eyes as a young man might with a photograph of his beloved held close. Here was all the friendship he needed – or wanted" (Desai 151). For Hugo, the street cats are nearest to him on the Indian social ladder, the same outcasts as him and therefore he provides them the shelter they need, out of his naïve compassion with comparable outsiders, unable to establish almost any contact with other human beings. Baumgartner simply resigned from finding his own place within the society, gave up trying to fit in and assume a role; he lived in ignorance. "Ignorance was, after all, his element. Ignorance was what he had made his own. It was his country, the one he lived in with familiarity and resignation and relief" (Desai 219). To summarize, Hugo's life has become extremely solitary, therefore failing to fulfil the condition of a successful identity creation, that is the definition of one's self in relation to other people, as a member of a social group.

The requirement of a defined sense of geographical belonging is also not fulfilled by Baumgartner since even after spending most of his life there, he still finds India oriental, exotic, different and considers himself not belonging into this society. "The life of Bombay which had been Baumgartner's life for thirty years now – or, rather, the setting of his life; he had never actually entered it, never quite captured it; damply, odorously, cacophonously palpable as it was, it had been elusive still" (Desai 214). Baumgartner is neither accepted by the environment, nor does he wish to be. For this reason, it could be logically deduced that Baumgartner's geographical home would be Germany, which would also find its justification in the novel where Hugo, when seeing a German woman in India, likens 'Deutschland' to the 'Heimat', i.e. the 'homeland' (Desai 127). However, at the same time, Baumgartner feels that Germany, as he knew it, no longer exists after the end of the Second World War: "Yes, there was nowhere to go. Germany was gone – phut. […] Let us face it, *Liebchen*, there is no home for us" (Desai 80). As Germany has always been the place where he felt rooted, where he was at home, the loss of this point of reference means that he is doomed to exist without any anchor to a specific place, not being able to define himself as belonging somewhere geographically, thus incarnating a liminal character, trapped between two countries neither of which is practically his own.

As we have seen, the originally smooth onset of the acquisition of identity within the familiar, known environment was harshly suspended and since then, Hugo has been in a constant search for a new, suitable identity. Besides, the unfinished development as a child caused his childish, naïve behaviour, his obsession with the fluffy, furry cats and also his absolute lack of any sexuality. Within this new environment, he has never successfully managed to find or define his new identity, doomed to live a solitary life with no friends (with the exception of Lotte), no fixed points, apart from his new family consisting of cats, and with no other certainties. One of the reasons of this frozen progress of identity definition might be the fact that his childhood did not provide the ideal basis for his later development. He was always held only within the environment of the family, without any chance to establish real relationships with other people. Therefore, when the identity confusion appeared, Hugo was not yet ready to react to the new situation, he embraced the extreme option of not developing the identity further and mentally remained in his childhood years.

3.4.2 **Hugo's unsuccessful transformation from the postcolonial perspective**

The modern, postcolonial point of view understands identity as a fluid substance, which adapts itself to the needs of the environment. On the example of *The Impressionist* we have witnessed how one may sail even through the most clearly given categories, such as race or gender, and change identities almost instantly, when needed. In the case of Hugo Baumgartner, we are, however, confronted with a completely different situation.

To save his life and future, Hugo is forced to travel to a completely unknown, and in his eyes exotic, fairy-tale country, where he might be able to complete the process of finishing the creation of his, at that time childish, identity. Therefore, his identity of a German schoolboy from a Jewish family, a son of his loving, caring, yet reclusive parents, might be considered the starting point which may later transform into a completely different, more suitable identity in compliance with the current situation. However, in the case of Baumgartner, the reader observes the inability and even the absence of struggle to establish a new, more fitting and acceptable identity. In comparison to Pran from *The Impressionist*, Hugo Baumgartner may be considered highly inflexible since, despite spending fifty years in India, he is still not able to assimilate himself to the new environment. He does not establish any closer contact with the new country and its inhabitants, he restricts the contact only to the minimal amount which would ensure the subsistence. Likewise, he never acquires the language completely and still employs his mother tongue (German) frequently, especially in those cases where he expresses some emotion. Furthermore, even his own body seems to only underline his inability to adapt to the non-native environment. Baumgartner suffers from strong perspiration, causing his need to mop his neck with a handkerchief almost incessantly. Besides, his skin has also never adapted to the hot Indian climate:

> For the Indian sun had not been good to his skin, it had not tanned and roasted him to the colour of a native. [...] His face blazed like an over-ripe tomato in the sun on which warts gathered like flies. His hair would not turn dark. [...] Even if he had used hair-dye and boot-polish, what could he have done about his eyes? It was not that they were blue - far from it; his mother had called them 'dark eyes, *dunkele Augen'*, but Indians did not seem to think them so. (Desai 19, 20)

It is not only Baumgartner's disposition which is inflexible in adapting to the Indian way of life, to which Hugo never becomes accustomed to, thus thwarting his endeavour to fit in the Indian society, but it is also the physical aspect of his body that is against his adaptation to the new environment. Similarly, Hugo's build also prevents one to categorise him

among other adults in that he is described as a clumsy, bumpy bumblebee, almost a childlike character from a fairy-tale or a comic book, also making him liminal as far as his alleged age is concerned.

Compared to the Impressionist, Hugo is by no means capable of mimicry as opposed to the chameleon-like Pran. Naturally, Hugo has not been endowed with such ambiguous looks as Pran, which would facilitate his position and possible transformation(s). Even though it is almost impossible to change anything about the appearance (the colour of one's skin, for instance), one can at least try to tailor the behaviour or work on the local language, to acquire as much of the language as possible, in order to give an impression of an individual who strives to integrate into a new society. However, Baumgartner, losing his native language (German) and not acquiring enough of English, does not put too much effort into the mastery of the local languages employed by the majority of Indian society either: "Gradually, the language [German] was slipping away from him, now almost as unfamiliar as the feel and taste of English words or the small vocabulary of bastardised Hindustani that he had picked up over the years" (Desai 150). As one might observe, Hugo does not devote time and energy to the acquisition of a language on a native-like level, he adopts only such amount of knowledge that would be sufficient for his life and basic communication in the environment. Becoming reconciled with the loss of his native country, Germany, he also slowly abandons the language, which only proves his preferred disposition of having no identity than forming a different one anew. Seeing that his German identity can no longer be viewed as applicable in the current situation, he simply withdraws and starts hiding from the rest of the world just like a small, immature child would. He decides not to fight for a new identity and rather resigns, surrenders and retreats.

Baumgartner's discontinued, interrupted development in his childhood, together with a series of shocks lead to the cessation of development. As a result, Hugo is presented as a child in an adult's body, he rejoices at his close relationship with animals, he appears rather like a teddy bear with his clumsy body language, with the complete absence of any sexually motivated behaviour and also with his joyful embracing of all possible routines, reducing his life to a set of predictable activities. This becomes apparent in the detention camp, where he is taken captive after the outbreak of the Second World War as a possible enemy, since he is of German origin. Such state of mind, appreciating the simplicity and

primitiveness might also be exemplified on his almost envious evaluation of the simplified life of the impoverished natives:

> When he overcame and left behind his initial horror at the sight of women carrying excreta on their heads and digging their hands into it as they might into wet dough or laundry, and his initial bewilderment at lives so primitive, so basic and unchanging, he began to envy them that simplicity, the absence of choice and history. By comparison, his own life seemed hopelessly tangled and unsightly. (Desai 111)

In this part of the novel, Hugo sees only the simplicity and therefore makes generalisations based on the stereotypes adopted and rooted in the privileged culture to which he no longer belongs. Hugo Baumgartner proves to be unable to understand his fellow human beings and he seems to embrace the colonial paradigm at this point by viewing the local inhabitants as one whole, not as individuals with their personal histories and hardships they have to face. He only sees the primitiveness and simplicity of their lives from his previous position of a member of the more "civilised", more dominant, privileged culture.

In addition to that, for Baumgartner, the immense freedom of choice and responsibility one has in shaping his or her identity is rather frightening, by no means liberating or pleasant. He would definitely appreciate a simpler, uncomplicated life where there would not be too many choices, where one would only exist without much thinking or tough decisions, simply just like a child for whom the parents always decide. This is further confirmed by the fact that, at certain points, Hugo wishes to go back to the detention camp where everything was clearly given and neatly prescribed, where he was safe and his life was rather controlled by others than by himself.

From the postcolonial point of view, the character of Baumgartner confronts us with a situation where the nucleus of identity is partly successfully created but it proves to be unsuitable and not compliant with the new situation. What is worse is that there is nothing to follow, no new identity which would effectively help to develop or replace the first one.

Nevertheless, Baumgartner might be viewed successfully from the two perspectives, both the traditional and the postcolonial one. From the traditional perspective, he freezes in one developmental stage and is unable to replace one identity with another which indicates that he, as a German, is incapable of submitting to the thought of colonialism turned upside down; a colonialism which stipulates his absorption and complete adaptation to the climate, temperament of the people, language and the like. On

the other hand, from the postcolonial perspective, he is unable to adapt himself to the new society, no matter how much the environment insists, he lacks the chameleon-like qualities of Pran. There seem to be only few fixed points of his identity, his clinging to Germany and childhood, to his mother and to the order upon which he can rely. On the whole, Baumgartner has to be designated as a liminal character from the point of view of Postcolonialism.

Baumgartner's Bombay from the point of view of liminality

In *Baumgartner's Bombay*, the reader comes across numerous examples of liminal states or situations, the most dominant being the processes of identity and personality formation of Hugo Baumgartner. During his childhood he belongs to neither group, the Germans or the Jews. He defines himself somewhere in between, perceiving himself Jewish because the outside, German world, perceives him as one, but otherwise feeling as a German since he has been brought up in such a way. Therefore, were it not for the overall anti-Semitic climate in Germany, Hugo would have counted himself among other members of the society, among the people of German nationality. However, by not feeling accepted by this group, forced to attend a school for Jewish children and also with his family being disadvantaged and persecuted because of their Jewish origin, he could not successfully integrate into the majority. Yet he does not feel a part of the Jewish minority either, as he does not think of himself as a Jew, the evidence of which might be found in the part of the novel where Hugo is searching for his possible roots, for the Jewish quarter in Venice, but gives up very quickly: "perhaps it was where Jewry was located but to him it was the East" (Desai 64), driving away any possible connection of his identity and the Jewish religion. Another piece of evidence of his not belonging to the Jewish society might be exemplified by the part of the novel where he is mourning for his deceased mother (which he finds out shortly after his returning from the detention camp):

> He thought now that if he had been brought up as an orthodox Jew, he could have mourned her with ceremony; he would have followed the ancient customs, recited the ancient words of solace, and perhaps they would have helped to still the agony. But he was ignorant, and therefore helpless, held in the grip of an unexpressed sorrow. (Desai 165)

It is the only moment where Hugo truly regrets that he was brought up in ignorance of the religion since, in this emotionally charged situation, he feels he has not got any spiritual solace which would help him overcome this terrible loss. Surely, it has to be concluded that he does not feel as an orthodox Jew, who would be able to draw some comfort from

his religion, he only suffers because of it, due to other people's condemnation. Similarly, his situation does not improve in the sense of belonging to a certain group in India. Separated from his native homeland, he is no longer a German citizen but he is far from being an Indian as well, not even ever intending to become one, to belong into the Indian society, as it has been dealt with in the previous section.

However, there are also many other aspects of the novel which might be found liminal apart from the main character. Hugo's way to India and especially his stay in Venice, as a transition from the earlier self to the newer self, from the West to the East, serves as a fitting example of a liminal space:

> Venice *was* the East and yet it was Europe, too; it was that magic boundary where the two met and blended, and for those seven days Hugo had been a part of their union. He realised it only now: that during his constant wandering, his ceaseless walking, he had been drawing closer and closer to this discovery of that bewitched point where they became one land of which he felt himself the natural citizen. (Desai 63)

In this sense, Venice represents a place where the two cultures, the Western and the Eastern merge together to create a colourful mixture, offering some of both traditions and cultures. It is also the only place where Hugo feels to be integrated, where he feels he could fit in. "If I could go, if I could leave, then I would go to Venice. [It is] both East and West, both Europe and Asia. I thought - maybe in such a place, I could be at home" (Desai 81). This impression that Venice made upon Hugo documents his position somewhere in between, therefore proves to be a place where he feels good and accepted, where there is no imperative need to fit into any of the categories, to be black or white. Both the edges and extremes of Germany and India, have awoken Baumgartner's anxiety, the idea that he cannot fit into any society and thus brought about his resignation. His identity remains peculiar, liminal, since he is trapped between two cultures (Jewish and Indian), yet he does not want to belong to either. The crucial difference between Baumgartner and Pran Nath from *The Impressionist* might be seen in the fact that Pran at least tries to exploit his liminality and slips from one identity to another, whereas Baumgartner adheres to the one, a forever liminal role of a stranger in a foreign country. Apart from being liminal from the geographical, national point of view, Baumgartner's in-between position is also strongly associated with the fact that his childhood self prevails over his adult self and he might simply be viewed as a child in an adult body, being neither one, nor the other.

What is more, the historical period that the novel is set in might be considered liminal as well. Hugo Baumgartner witnesses two enormous countries at historical

crossroads, in the space of in-between epochs. The situation in Germany is captured shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, whereas India is depicted before, during the Second World War and after it gained its independence. The atmosphere of confusion, of uncertainty, of what the future may bring, only contributes to the overall liminal impression of the novel.

Moreover, by trying to comprehend the foreign, exotic culture, Hugo experiences numerous collisions with his previous understanding of different matters and discovers the relativity of their interpretations in diverse cultures. He sees that, even though it seems that one can distinguish between such primal categories as different colours, one may never be sure whether his or her perspective is the 'right' one accepted in all cultures: "[...] but in the East colours were not, he knew, the colours they were in the West" (Desai 84). These clashes with a different reality significantly question Hugo's previously gained knowledge and its validity within the new environment. For this reason we have to admit that the truths we take for granted within our society might appear completely different from another point of view, therefore our knowledge can be assessed as only partially valid, somewhere between valid and invalid, i.e. liminal.

Furthermore, one can designate the language which is used throughout the novel as liminal, due to the very frequent use of German words or phrases. Overall, the text includes numerous intertextual excerpts, predominantly nursery rhymes or songs of German origin which document the importance of the German childhood not only for Hugo Baumgartner, but also the importance of German-speaking environment for the author herself. Apart from the nursery rhymes, the reader is confronted with frequent German words which are integrated into the English text, usually without any translation, in order to illustrate Hugo's bilingual disposition. The typical occasions when German is used are the situations which mark Baumgartner's emotional involvement, e.g. his encounters with his cats, chatting with Lotte, or in the letters from his mother: "Liebchen, meine kleine Maus, Mein Häschen, Geliebter" (Desai 3, 5) and the like. This proves the importance of German and the continuation of the emotional bond to the homeland, which was established during Hugo's early childhood. Even after most of his German knowledge disappears, those are the words which persist in Hugo's mind, words that cannot be forgotten.

Apart from this rather positive impact of the bilingual situation, the mixture of the two languages is not always beneficial: "He mumbled 'Good morning, *salaam*', and went down the steps into the street with his bag, uncertain as ever as of which language to

employ. After fifty years, still uncertain. Baumgartner, *du Dummkopf*' (Desai 6). The liminal state in which Baumgartner finds himself complicates his situation in that he is confused as to which language should be used in which situation. This boosts his feeling of uncertainty within the new environment and also widens the gap between the 'common' members of the society and him, as a stranger.

The frequency of employment of Indian words differs greatly from those in German, because it is connected with negative emotions or the display of dominance. Baumgartner is constantly called and stigmatised with the word *firanghi,* i.e. a foreigner. The different use of the two languages suggests quite patently the different attitude of Hugo towards both languages and the respective societies, cultures. Associating the endearments and the language employed when speaking to his closest companions, i.e. Lotte and the cats, with German clearly shows that, even though he was despised and persecuted by the German society, he still feels himself to be German and perceives these roots from his childhood to be the only possible ones which he can adhere to. Conversely, this proves that, when relating the Indian words only to the cold, impersonal and even derogatory meanings, his relationship to Indian culture never becomes as cordial or intimate as it did to German culture.

The ambiguous nationality of immigrants also provides a fertile ground for various liminal situations because it is hard to definitively determine whether one belongs to the former, native land or whether he or she should be already counted to the 'new' society. This ambiguity might well be taken advantage of, as we have seen in *The Impressionist*'s case and also in the case of Lotte from *Baumgartner's Bombay*. Hugo's inability to use this situation and slip between the categories aggravated his life strongly, as opposed to Lotte, his German friend in India: "[Hugo:] 'We are in British territory and we are German nationals-' [Lotte:] 'You are, but I am not,' she interrupted. 'No? What do you mean? What nationality have you?' 'Ach, what does it matter? I can change any day that I want'" (Desai 101). Indeed, Hugo's loyalty to the German nation together with his inflexibility, the inability to adapt contributed greatly to his complete confusion of identity and its deficient development.

Confirming the universally acknowledged fact that liminality is typical of many postcolonial writers and their works, we have witnessed numerous examples of in-betweenness in *Baumgartner's Bombay*. Naturally, the aspect which hints at liminality the most, is the character of Baumgartner himself who is liminal from the beginning to his

death, being an unaccepted Jew in Germany and later an immigrant not willing to assimilate in India. It is important to realise that the greatest decision of his life took place when he was in liminal age. This provides additional evidence of the importance of liminality impacting on the rest of his life, projecting into adulthood when he might be considered a child in an adult's body.

Hybridity in *Baumgartner's Bombay*

In this novel, as opposed to *The Impressionist*, we are not confronted with a clear example of miscegenation or racial mixing, so one cannot speak about hybridity in the original, rather racist, sense. Nevertheless, the works of postcolonial literature often thematise the fear of hybridity, a society dreading the foreign influence which might dilute the clarity of their culture and traditions, or simply the fear of the unknown, foreign; *Baumgartner's Bombay* being no exception. Since we get the story mainly from the Baumgartner's point of view, the biased ideas come mostly from his side and are generally directed against India and its lifestyle. Very shortly after Hugo sets foot on the Indian ground for the first time, he is already worried about its potentially disastrous effect on his life: "After standing around helplessly, he finally cleared his throat - and found it hurt. A germ? A deadly illness? All seemed possible, too possible, in this setting" (Desai 84). In a foreign environment, one is always alert, inspecting the reactions of the body upon the new setting far more carefully than usual and panicking immediately because of the smallest hint at some problem, which would normally be completely ignored. In this way, one considers the foreign, exotic setting to be dangerous, threatening and treacherous, simply because it is different from what one is used to. Similarly, Baumgartner receives a piece of advice from a fellow-passenger, a European missionary, promoting the indispensability of the extra protective skin of a banana which should shield him from the 'dirty', exotic influence on the way by train from Bombay to Calcutta. "'The only thing you can eat on a journey in this country. It is not touched by their hands, you see, it is protected by its skin. The skin - it is thicker than ours, see. And peanuts, in their shells,' he added" (Desai 89). The Europeans are so afraid of becoming infected, polluted by the harmful, detrimental climate of India that they feel almost naked only with their soft skin, susceptible to fall prey to the aggressive germs and viruses that are so common for, from their point of view, the uncivilised and dirty India.

From the other, Indian, perspective, Hugo, as a liminal, hybrid character (not fitting into any prescribed category), representing the features of two different cultures, also

appears to be undesirable and unwanted; at least as he himself interprets the non-verbal messages he seems to be receiving. The most powerful moment when Baumgartner believes everything to be telling him that he is not welcome is when, during one of his business trips, he accidentally enters a mysterious, dark cave. He feels the presence of some enigmatic spiritual power which, without any reason, expels him from the cave:

> He turned and scrambled out of the narrow exit with such speed that he scratched his arms against the stone, hurt his knee against his rib, and fell out on to the hillside as if ejected by whatever possessed or inhabited that temple. Indigestible, inedible Baumgartner. The god had spat him out. *Raus*, Baumgartner, out. Not fit for consumption, German or Hindu, human or divine. [...] He had not been found fit. Shabby, dirty white man, *firanghi*, unwanted. *Raus*, Baumgartner, *raus*. (Desai 190)

No matter whether the signs that Baumgartner sees are real or only imagined, the important inference is that he feels unwelcome, unwanted, and alien. He comprehends that the native inhabitants do not view his possible contribution to the society as beneficial and therefore reject him. As a result, he retreats, draws back and hides in the shell of his own world, where the only sense of his life is taking care of his beloved cats.

Even though Homi Bhabha and other postcolonial theorists view hybridity as enriching, energising and generally beneficial, one often does not come across such understanding of this concept in real life. Anything unknown, unfamiliar had always been viewed with suspicion and concern, with fear that it might influence the established culture with its traditions detrimentally. Therefore, any foreign, Other influence (be it the Eastern or the Western one) is considered rather negative, since it threatens the old, traditional values in that they may have to change to fit the possible new mixture of influences and new traditions. The novel *Baumgartner's Bombay* only confirms and denounces, ridicules, at the same time, this biased, stereotypical, misanthropic point of view which is, however, aimed mutually, from the side of both cultures which fear the influence of the Other. Baumgartner, as a lost traveller, is sentenced to wander perpetually between the two cultures, without any chance or will to become a part of either.

4 Conclusion

This thesis is concerned with the analysis of the conception of identity and its development in two novels of Indian English literature, *The Impressionist* by Hari Kunzru and *Baumgartner's Bombay* by Anita Desai. Specifically it focuses on the scrutiny of the process of identity formation of two major characters, Pran Nath and Hugo Baumgartner in the novels. In particular, it explores the ways of the resolution of each character's identity crises in order to find out both how their identity is created, how they react to the sudden change of their situation and the related loss of their originally created identity.

To gain insight into the theory behind the concept of identity, two approaches are presented which contribute significantly to the later analysis of the works within the practical part. Firstly, the traditional view of identity is inspected, elucidating the basic conception of identity as the internal and external perception of a person (i.e. the importance of how the person perceives him- or herself and also how he or she is accepted as a member of various social groups). Besides, two major traditionalist theories of identity and its development are presented; the theory by Erik Erikson and his psychosocial crises which have to be resolved within the development, and the theory by Cote and Levine which presents different strategies of forming an identity. Importantly, both these approaches define identity as a relatively stable, unchanging concept, whose formation should be finalised already during adolescence.

To offset this relatively reductive understanding, the theory of postcolonial identity is introduced, revising the traditional one, since the postcolonial theorists (such as Cherki Karkaba, Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said and Frantz Fanon) believe that identity is a fluid substance which transforms itself according to the current needs of the environment. This conception considers the original, firstly gained identity as a mere starting point of the changes which occur later in life with the identity repeatedly adjusting to fit the circumstances and the requirements of the moment. Additionally, three crucial notions of the postcolonial theory, i.e. liminality, mimicry and hybridity, are described within the theoretical part since they depict the various possible resolutions of a situation when one's identity ends up at a crossroads. Furthermore, the three concepts are crucial for the description of the main characters of the novels, as well as for their differentiation. Apart from the explanation of the theoretical ideas, the biographies of the authors of the two novels, Hari Kunzru and Anita Desai, are presented, as well as their most successful works.

Based on the theoretical part, it seems that the mixed and highly complex origin of both protagonists, Pran Nath (being a half-caste in colonial India) and Hugo Baumgartner (a Jew in Nazi Germany) means that the development of their identities is not continual and without obstacles. On the contrary, it is anticipated that both of them would have to experience an identity crisis and are most likely determined as liminal characters, i.e. somewhere in between. Furthermore, the postcolonial theory is applied on the analysis of both works to determine what effect the fluid, changing identity has on the two characters.

In order to address these issues, the practical part deals with the analysis of the selected works as such. The novels are presented with short introductions, followed by the exploration of the identities of the main protagonists from the two main perspectives, traditional and postcolonial. The traditional point of view focuses especially on the early, childhood development of both characters. Pran and Hugo have both experienced a major identity crisis in their early years, the former being condemned by his family for his newly discovered mixed origin (half-Indian and half-English), the latter for being a Jew in Germany at a time when the anti-Semitic atmosphere strengthened significantly which forced him to relocate to India. Therefore, their identities had to be somehow reformulated in order to fit the new requirements of the new, unwelcoming milieu.

Subsequently, the postcolonial view on identity is employed to show how the individuals react to their current, changed situation and how, and to what extent, they tailor their previous identities to the new environment and its requirements. This perspective significantly differentiates the two novels since it indicates that Pran Nath's way of coping with a new, highly complicated, situation proved to be much more flexible and adaptable than the one of Hugo Baumgartner. Pran manages to slip between the categories, changes, creates his new, fitting identities smoothly, according to his current needs and thus transforms himself from a lowly, despised half-caste child into an almost authentic Englishman of decent education, perceived eventually as "too English", too conventional thanks to his extraordinary skill of mimicry. Since not even such perfect transformation ensured him ultimate happiness and contentment in the form of a marriage with an Englishwoman, Pran is eventually, voluntarily, deprived of his gained, pretended European identity and re-establishes his original, true self with the help of a primitive tribe in Africa. Therefore, he might be viewed as the accurate incarnation of the postcolonial idea of fluid identity.

As opposed to Pran, Hugo Baumgartner appears to react to his new situation in a completely different manner. The development of his identity freezes at the point of change and does not move any further during his whole life in India. Hugo becomes a child in an adult body with his fondness for cats, with old German nursery rhymes and songs he repeats, along with his obsessive need of order and various daily routines that he adheres to. Hugo is not capable of adapting to the Indian environment and rather withdraws from society, with no need to establish any contact with other people, leading a solitary life, only with his cats, equal outcasts within the Indian society.

Both works are analysed from the perspective of liminality revealing that the chosen characters evince significant in-between features. The origin of both protagonists is mixed; Pran, begot by an Indian mother and an English father and Hugo, though he was raised as a German, was ultimately stigmatised and persecuted for being a Jew. Pran is not liminal only due to his origin, but the whole strategy of his adaptation in every chapter confirms his liminality. Similarly, Hugo might be further designated as liminal by virtue of his child-adult uncertainty, being a child in an unfitting, adult body or due to the language he employs which is a mixture of all the influences he has been affected by - German, English and Hindu.

Based on this comparison, it might be concluded that both characters and their identities are largely influenced by the colonial reality and serve as examples of the, rather detrimental, influence of colonialism and colonial usurpation upon individuals. Pran Nath/Rukhsana/White Boy/Pretty Bobby/Jonathan Bridgeman/The Impressionist and Hugo Baumgartner represent completely opposing approaches towards the fluid, changing character of postcolonial identity and towards the solution of an identity crisis from the traditionalist point of view. However, neither of the approaches seems to be successful or beneficial for them. Even though Pran appears to be the perfect incarnation of fluidity of postcolonial identity, it does not seem to work in his favour, since he becomes a rather hollow container, a blank canvas upon which new identities are projected without any considerably stable identity or point of reference. In opposition to that, Baumgartner rejects the transformative nature of identity and sticks to the previously created, childish one, without developing it further when confronted with a new situation. Thus he seems to be successful from the traditional perspective, retaining an identity which is far more stable than Pran's. However, it by no means proves to be a victory for him since it results in the completely arrested development, reclusive way of life and with him not being able to deal

with his adult identity. In short, both characters are, to a certain extent, two extremities, two poles of the treatment of identity crisis, neither of which can be designated as successful.

Therefore, on the example of these works of postcolonial literature, the postcolonial dilemma of identity is revealed. It has been demonstrated that identity has to be anchored to some stable, solid foundations to be considered fully-fledged. Without a fixed point of reference, with identity only floating in a vacuum space, one's true, functioning identity cannot be rightly formulated, just as we have seen in the case of Pran Nath with his fading, artificial identities. Consequently, there can be nothing like an absolutely, perfectly fluid, transforming and unstable identity in a fully-fledged, self-assured, moral human being, as it lacks stability, moral responsibility and sincerity. To sum up, these characters, these two extremities of the solution of identity crisis are a metaphorical incarnation of the struggle of postcolonial identity, which both authors approach from opposing directions. In the case of Baumgartner, Anita Desai presents a completely fixed, frozen identity of her main protagonist, whereas Pran's identity, as portrayed by Hari Kunzru, proves to be the ever-changing one, absolutely loose, fluid and elusive. The analysis clearly demonstrates that neither of these two approaches responds to the challenges of the evolving postcolonial world and reality, both demonstrating an extreme example of failed attempts at the successful inclusion of an individual into the society.

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